GOLD IN THE FURNACE

M. H. CORNWALL LEGH.

E. E. Faulkner

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See page 257.

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AUTHOR OF

'AN UNFORTUNATE GIRL,' ETC. ETC.

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THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

56 PATERNOSTER ROW AND 65 ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	RAVENHILL FARM	9
II.	MILLY LADBROKE	18
III.	A BUTTONHOLE AND A SERMON	28
IV.	MILLY'S NEW FRIENDS	47
V.	THE DAWN OF LOVE	58
VI.	MARY FIGHTS APOLLYON	75
VII.	AT COLONEL BRIDGER'S	86
VIII.	THE DOWNWARD PATH	115
IX.	A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE	129
X.	THE STORM BREAKS	138
XI.	ARRESTED	160
XII.	SUMMARY CONVICTION	181
XIII.	THE FIRST DAY IN GAOL	197
XIV.	THE VICTORY OF FAITH	232
XV.	THE VICTORY OF LOVE	247
XVI.	HIDDEN THINGS BROUGHT TO LIGHT	270
XVII.	AFTERWARDS	284
XVIII.	RAVENHILL FARM ONCE MORE	303
XIX.	'A WEALTHY PLACE'	314

REFINING FIRE

THOU passest through the fire, my heart,
  God's furnace of refining grief;
The cruel flames around thee leap,
They rise and fall, they curl and creep:
  Pray God their work be brief.

The fire is fierce and hot, my heart;
  It hungers for thine hoarded gold,
It thirsts to drink thy bitter tears,
It strives to clutch the hopes and fears
  Thy inmost life doth hold.

Fear not to feed the flame, my heart,
  With all thy gold stored up so long;
The fire of woe doth not destroy,
But purifies from all alloy,
  And perfect makes and strong.

Thou art not there alone, my heart,
  Good angels go before, behind,
For cheer and counselling, whose wings
Do make with holy winnowings
  A moist and whistling wind.

And One is sitting near, my heart,
  For ever bending down to see
Thy molten gold, thy humbled will,
Thy strength to suffer lying still,
  Whose look doth comfort thee.

He waits with patience, O my heart;
He bore Himself that crucial heat;
He stills thy trembling, makes thee strong,
Decides thy trial short or long,
And counts thine every beat.

And when He sees on thee, my heart,
His perfect image mirrored plain
(It may be in a little while),
Himself shall draw thee with a smile
From out the fires of pain.

H. STOCKALL.

(By kind permission of the Author.)

GOLD IN THE FURNACE

CHAPTER I

RAVENHILL FARM

RAVENHILL FARM was one of the prettiest, though not the largest, of the farms on the Avonbridge estate. The old-fashioned house, with its black-and-white front, gabled roof and diamond-paned windows, was so picturesque a building that visitors to the Hall who had artistic tastes were always brought to see and admire it. Its garden, which was as old-fashioned as the house, was gay with flowers all the year round, the Christmas roses never quite dying out before the snowdrops appeared on the stretch of grass between the clipped yew-trees, to be followed soon after by the crocuses and wall-flowers that flourished in the warm south border beneath the parlour window.

The flower-garden was the pride of Mary Copeland's heart, and her sole charge, and whatever Mary loved and cared for was sure to thrive. So her stepfather said, and it may well be supposed that her own mother was not disposed to disagree with him; nor indeed was

anyone about the house of which Mary was the sunshine and, it must be added, the ruling spirit. From the time she was a little girl, Mary had always taken care of her mother, a gentle, fragile woman, early left a widow, and when Mrs. Copeland had married a second time, Mary's good sense and general capacity were so well developed that she had at once become a power in the new home. Then she had been but fourteen, now she was twenty, with three young stepbrothers to adore and look up to her, and with a mother, as Aunt Susan Ladbroke used to say, 'So well brought up, she would never dream of disobeying Mary.'

Aunt Susan was the only person from whom Mary heard the home-truths which in most households are dealt round unsparingly to knock the nonsense out of the young people. This made her a very useful, but not very agreeable, relative, and Mary rather wished her mother had not asked her in to tea on the Saturday evening when this story opens. It had been a very busy day. Only one woman servant was kept on the farm, for John Turnbull could not afford any lavish expenditure, and Mary had a leading hand in all the work that was done. She could make the best butter and the best cream-cheese of any in the place, so her family said with pride. She knew all about the management of poultry, and brought up the calves herself. She trained one raw young girl after another to cook and clean ; she was not quite so patient as she wanted to be with the stupid ones, but genuinely kind to all, and so thorough in her teaching that a year at Ravenhill Farm was a good preparation for any young woman's domestic career.

Mary had been up at five, had churned and made twelve pounds of butter with her own hands, had

superintended the baking of a batch of bread large enough to last half a week, had gone through the boys' clothes, putting in stitches wherever necessary, so as to have everything in readiness for their church-going to-morrow, and had got through a hundred other things of the small and perpetual kind, on the carrying out of which by the woman of a house the comfort and well-being of that house so largely depends.

It was, therefore, distinctly 'aggravating' of Aunt Susan, as she walked deliberately up the garden-path at the moment when Mary had just run out with a watering-can, to have pity on the seedlings whose heads were beginning to droop with the drought, to say—

'Well, Mary! there you are, pottering about among your flowers again! I should have thought myself lucky indeed, at your age, if I had had time for such things—on a Saturday, too!'

'Polly's got through more work than you have, or anyone in Avonbridge, or Exbridge either, I'd have a bet!' angrily responded Jock, the second of Mary's stepbrothers, always ready to act her champion on the occasions, certainly rare ones, when any such was needed. He had come out to bring her more water, and Mary, with a laughing rebuke for his impertinence, made over her watering-pot to the boy, and went in to skim the milk for tea. When guests were invited—even if only Aunt Susan—they always had cream; on other occasions Mary did not allow cream except on Sundays, her decision being undisputed, since she was manager of the dairy. Whatever came under Mary's management was carried on with due regard to economy, to the need of which she was more alive than her easy-going, liberal-handed stepfather, or her mother, who had never had a head for accounts. It

worried Mary, with her business-like and peculiarly honourable nature, that the money never seemed forthcoming to pay the bills till a considerable time after their arrival, and that there was always a period of anxiety and scraping together of all the available cash before rent day.

'Mary won't ever let us go to the workhouse!' Turnbull used to say, laughing, when she brought him with pride the earnings from the dairy, every penny of which she could accurately account for.

The table was already laid in the parlour. It did not take long to skim the cream and make the tea, and the party sat down together to that sociable meal, all of them, except Mrs. Turnbull, with hearty country appetites that matched the roses on their cheeks. As they were sitting over the second cups, the postman arrived with a letter, which Mary took from him.

'It's for you, mother; from Milly,' she said, looking at the pink envelope covered with a sprawling hand.

Mrs. Turnbull opened and read it.

'Milly says she is coming over to spend the afternoon to-morrow, and she hopes we won't mind her bringing her young man.'

A series of exclamations went round the table.

'I think she might have written in time for us to let her know whether we wanted him,' was Mary's comment. It was one of her most frequently repeated resolutions not to make disagreeable remarks about Milly, but somehow the subject of her cousin never seemed to come up without her feeling impelled to break this resolution. The two girls had been brought up together, Mary's father having given a home to Milly Ladbroke when she was left an orphan; but their widely different natures had prevented their ever becoming fond of each other. When twelve years old

they had been sent together to boarding-school, where Milly had found herself in a congenial element, and Mary had so cried her eyes out for home, and lost health and appetite in the confinement of a town, that, after one term, she had been brought back to finish her education at the village school. Milly had remained a pupil long enough to learn a smattering of French and acquire the capacity of strumming a few tunes on the piano, and had then been promoted to the dignity of pupil-teacher, 'governess student,' as it was called at Miss Dennison's establishment, and had ultimately developed into a teacher of the youngest class. Milly was not, by nature, fond of children, or particularly good at teaching, but the calling of governess was one of the ladylike professions, and Milly's ambition was to be a lady,—that is, what she understood by the word.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Turnbull as she read her niece's letter. 'Milly has left Miss Dennison's! She thinks she is quite fitted now to take a situation on her own account; and till she hears of one, she is staying at a very select boarding-house in Gladstone Road, Pernambuco Lodge. That is the fashionable part of Exbridge,' continued Mrs. Turnbull; 'I should think it would be expensive.'

'If the girl is earning her own living, I suppose no one need object to that,' remarked Aunt Susan, a trifle tartly.

'Oh dear no!' Mrs. Turnbull agreed; she never had the face to argue. 'If poor Milly can make her own way, it is to her credit, only she seems a bit young to be quite out on the world.'

'No younger than Mary,' retorted Miss Ladbroke; 'and I'm sure Mary would feel capable of managing for herself, not to say for other people. And she'd not have submitted to be so long under anyone as Milly

has been under that schoolmistress. Would you, Mary? I should just like to see you trying it for a year or so!'

'Well, we shouldn't,' answered Turnbull for her. 'And there'll be no need for Polly to serve anyone, so long as I've got a roof for our heads to go under.'

Mary returned an affectionate smile. These two were as fond of each other as if they had been actual father and daughter, and there was not enough point in Aunt Susan's frequent insinuations that Mary ought to go out and make a living for herself, instead of being dependent on a step-parent, for them to prick her.

'But what about Milly's young man?' Turnbull went on, never wishing the conversation to take an unpleasant tone. 'We have not heard anything of him before.'

'He is a Canadian—Mr. Stewart—lately come to the Exbridge branch of the Anglo-Colonial Bank. He is quite a gentleman, Milly says, and most attentive to her.'

There was a little laugh round the table.

'And why not?' Aunt Susan said. 'Milly is a pretty girl, with a good deal of style about her too, and she has been very well educated. There is no reason that she should not make a really good match.'

Mrs. Turnbull assented readily. 'Poor little Milly, I only wish we could hear of it,' she said. 'All alone in the world as she is, and . . .' but a glance at her sister-in-law prevented her enumerating the characteristics which gave her anxiety about the orphan. 'I hope she will find a good husband.'

'I wouldn't give much for the man that would fall in love with Milly,' remarked Jem, the eldest of the three brothers, a boy of twelve, whose precocious

remarks were the laugh of the family. 'A stuck-up, conceited thing like that!'

'Hush, hush!' exclaimed his mother, with a positively frightened look at Aunt Susan, who promptly stretched her long thin arm across the table and gave Jem a box on the ear.

The little episode was laughed off, as it was the happy custom to do with all disagreeables in that family, where, as somebody had once said, for one tear there were always five hundred smiles. Then everybody had a third cup of tea, which Turnbull followed by a fourth, after which Mary made the move, and the table was rapidly cleared with the aid of the boys, whom she said she was turning into splendid parlour-maids! Mary wanted to be quick this evening; in fact, she always wanted to be quick, but on Saturday there was an extra reason, for in this interval between tea and the time the family gathered round the evening lamp, she took the little space of quiet time in her own room in preparation for the next day's service.

The Avonbridge tenants worshipped at Sir Philip Fitzjames's private chapel, and the chaplain, one of his sons, known on the estate as 'Mr. Vincent,' who knew all the circumstances and the difficulties of their daily lives, was always very practical in his teaching. Mary, at least, followed the advice which he had given to set apart 'a solid quarter of an hour by the clock,' to prepare themselves for the Communion, whenever they were coming to that service. At first the time had seemed extraordinarily long to her, and she had felt that she had found out all her sins, and made petitions for all her wants, and come to the end of all her thoughts on serious subjects, before ten minutes were over. Then she had wondered if there was any good

in so formal a rule, and might have relaxed it, if she had not come across a warning against 'trying to get rid of formalism by doing away with forms.' But she had resolved to continue her practice, and endeavour to put more earnestness into it. Now, Mary found the quarter of an hour all too short, and she had learnt that the value of the time thus set apart lay in going into her own conduct during the past seven days—like the weekly balancing of accounts—studying the Bible, and asking on her knees for what she had thus learned she needed.

Mary got up to her room as quickly as she could, shut her door, and went to the window. She always liked to look out at the sky when she prayed; it seemed to help her to realise the world beyond. The scent of the sweetbriar, just coming into leaf, rose with the moisture of evening, and made her chamber fragrant, as she reviewed the week just gone, finding some slips, as she always did, but on the whole a fair account of duty done. While thus engaged, voices came up from the garden-path below, along which Mary's stepfather was walking with her Aunt Susan. The words which she distinguished were evidently the middle of a sentence.

'. . . to keep praising up Mary to her face, as you do! You're all spoiling the girl, and if she hadn't me to take the conceit out of her she would be worse than she is. You may talk, but I can tell you there's as much pride inside Miss Mary's gingham gown as there is inside Milly's Paris model dresses, and . . .' Again the words became undistinguishable.

Mary gave a little mental start. She felt very indignant. What had Mr. Vincent once said? That when people were angry at finding themselves blamed for a fault, it was generally because there was some

truth in the accusation. Was it true that she was proud — conceited? There were the voices coming back! It was her stepfather who was speaking this time.

'Well, I daresay it's true the girl's got a good opinion of herself, but hasn't she cause to have? If she is what you call a bit conceited, I'm sure nine girls out of ten would be more so, if . . .'

It was true, then! Even her stepfather acknowledged it, and he, in common with her whole family, took the most indulgent view of her imaginable. What a disagreeable discovery! And in what a disagreeable way it had come! If she had found it out for herself, Mary would not so much have minded. But to have Aunt Susan say it, and then father agree with her!

Mary was longer than a quarter of an hour in her room that evening, and the boys were calling out, 'Polly! Where's Polly?' as always happened when she was more than a few minutes out of the way, before she came downstairs again; but when she did, there was not a touch of impatience at their repeated calls; there might have been, if she had not spent the last ten minutes as she had.

CHAPTER II

MILLY LADBROKE

'THERE'S Milly coming with her young *gentleman*! I wonder which he'll be most like, Mr. Fitzjames, or Mr. Vincent, or Mr. Jack!'

Turnbull, his broad face beaming with a laugh which was not intended to be ill-natured, watched the two figures which had just appeared in the distance. They were approaching by the pathway across the fields, which was the nearest way from Exbridge.

Mary laughed too; she had long ago got over her vexation at Milly's announcement that she was going to introduce her town-bred, and probably very vulgar, 'young man' to them, and was rather curious to see what he was like. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and well set-up; she could see that from this distance, and, as the pair approached nearer, Mary saw that he was good-looking.

Milly, by right of her connection with the Ravenhill family, always entered by the little side gate that led directly into the flower-garden.

'Let us go and meet them,' said Turnbull, ever ready with an hospitable welcome; and it was at the wicket gate, beneath the yew-tree arch that had taken hundreds of years in growing, where the beds

of orange and purple crocuses looked at each other across the mossy walk, that Mary first met Malcolm Stewart. He was so tall that his hat was knocked off as he passed under the arch, which made him laugh. Mary laughed too as it rolled towards her, and she picked it up. So, laughing, they shook hands without waiting for Milly's formal introduction.

'It was very good of you to ask me over here,' he said, addressing Turnbull.

'So like Milly to pretend he had been asked!' Mary commented inwardly; then she gave herself a mental pinch, for she ought not to think uncharitable things when she could not say them!

'Very glad to see you, I'm sure,' Turnbull responded warmly. 'Is this the first time you have been over this way?'

'Yes, I may say it is my first experience of an English village. I've been over in the Old Country nearly a year, but I have spent most of that time in London. It is only a month since I came to Exbridge, and I have been kept pretty tight to work since then. It seems like home,' he added, 'seeing the cows and the poultry about the yard. My father keeps a farm.'

He was not at all like the squire's sons. There was a slight accent in his voice, partly Scotch, from his Scots parentage, and partly Canadian, from the land of his bringing up, and there were no pretensions about him of any kind, but—perhaps it should be said, because of this second characteristic—Mary saw that for once Milly had been right: Malcolm Stewart was a gentleman.

He had all the honourable feelings and manly instincts which are the real characteristics of gentlemen. In the part of Canada from which he came, a country district upon the St. John River, there hardly existed

distinctions of class, and the Stewarts, by reason of their superior characters and unusual intelligence and ability, were the best people in the place, though the father made no pretensions to having come of a family which moved in what is known as 'Society' in Scotland.

Malcolm Stewart, in common with his brothers, had had an excellent elementary education at the free school in the village, to which everyone, including the clergyman of the parish, sent his children. He had always loved books, and spent most of his spare hours over them, so that his father had thought it worth while to send him, as soon as he was old enough, to the University at Fredericton. Malcolm came back with strongly developed scientific tastes, and a desire to apply more science than had ever been tried before in that neighbourhood to the advancement of farming. To carry out his schemes, however, further knowledge was required, and, still more emphatically, more money, and Stewart was not willing to expend the savings on which he counted for starting his younger children in life on making any experiments. If Malcolm wanted to lay out capital on these ideas of his, the first point was for him to make the capital which he required. There would be plenty of time by and by, when the farm was his own, to try his new-fangled methods. Malcolm had sense enough to see this for himself, though it went very much against the grain when, a good opening occurring in the St. John branch of the Anglo-Colonial Bank, Stewart, who ruled his family with patriarchal authority, insisted upon his eldest son accepting it.

The life of a bank clerk was the last life in the world that Malcolm would have chosen, as far as the work itself was concerned. There were, however,

advantages in it. The hours being comparatively short, he had plenty of opportunity at other times for taking the open-air exercise he needed, and of going on with his studies ; and there was a hope that some day he might be transferred to one of the English branches.

To visit the Old Country had always been Malcolm's dream, as that of most intelligent young Canadians, and, after three years of patient waiting, the dream was realised. Thanks to the interest used by the manager of the St. John branch, who had taken a great liking to the young man from his boyhood, Malcolm was summoned to headquarters, and after a few months at one of the London houses was sent down to occupy a very good position in the bank at Exbridge. There was a great deal of business to get through, owing to incapacity on the part of his predecessor, and it was after a succession of days spent over troublesome accounts, with no time for the following of any of his favourite pursuits, that Malcolm accepted the invitation of his fellow-boarder to come out and spend Sunday afternoon with her relatives in the country. Milly had apologised for them a little, speaking of them as of humbler position than her own, but 'good-hearted people,' she had said, 'and rich enough to make a show ; though they always kept to their old-fashioned ways, like country people do.'

If Malcolm felt himself at home among the surroundings of a farm, he soon made his hosts feel quite at home with him. Gentle little Mrs. Turnbull had been a trifle afraid of him, from Milly's description. She was always afraid of grand people who weren't 'the real gentlefolk, that you know where you are with.' She had had nervous fears that this 'gentleman' would consider them beneath him, and, if he did so,

Mary was sure to resent it, and, perhaps too frankly, show him her mind. For the one thing that Mary could not stand was airs, which had exactly the opposite effect on her from making her afraid of people.

But Malcolm's unaffected manner set Mrs. Turnbull at ease at once, and his constant references to the farm at home took away any feeling of shyness she might otherwise have experienced at his evidences of superior education. Milly was a little vexed at these frequent allusions to the paternal farm, and took care to explain to Mary, when she went upstairs to take off her hat, that a farmer in Canada meant a landowner, and consequently corresponded in position with Sir Philip Fitzjames and the neighbouring squires.

Milly's hat was a very elaborate affair. It had a whole bird with extended wings in front of it, a plume of cocks' feathers at the side, and a mass of orange roses and green and purple ribbons all over the rest of it. Mary was quite relieved to see her take it off, and she watched, with an expression that was not admiration, her cousin's manipulations of the frizzy fringe which extended itself over the top of her head, and stuck out at the sides, as Jem used to say, just like the roof of a thatched cottage. Nor did Mary admire the dress made on the model of the smartest costume in *The Ladies' Mirror* for April, of a material intended to simulate silk, trimmed with what the dressmaker called *motives*, as much too cheap to be really handsome as they were too expensive for Milly's slender purse.

At Miss Dennison's establishment Milly had been obliged to keep her dress to some extent under control, though she had always succeeded in being smart enough on Sundays to look vulgar; but now she was

a young lady on her own account she was taking advantage of it to try and dress as fashionably as the richest woman who walked the streets of Exbridge.

'What do you think of him?' asked Milly in a casual way, as she gave her fluffy head a final touch, and prepared to go downstairs.

'Mr. Stewart? I haven't seen much of him yet.'

'I don't suppose you're likely to see much of him, but I thought I'd bring him out for once, and let you see him. Aunt Alice is apt not to think much of my friends.'

Mary wondered how a person like Mr. Stewart had ever come to be reckoned among Milly's friends, and her next words betrayed the wonder, though she had not intended they should.

'How did you get to know Mr. Stewart so well?'

Milly gave a little laugh.

'You'd better ask him that,' she said. 'Ever since I came to the house he's been showing me attention. He takes me out with him every Sunday afternoon, and treats me to everything just as if he were a lord. Why, doesn't it show that we're intimate his coming out here with me to-day?'

'Not if you asked him to, and told him that we had invited him—when we hadn't!' Mary answered bluntly. It was her habit to say out whatever was in her mind.

Milly laughed again, but a little angrily. She knew that Malcolm Stewart would never have paid her any attention, if she had not put herself in his way and used all the arts she possessed to make herself attractive to him, and wake his sympathy for her position as an orphan alone in the world, some instinct telling her that the shortest way to his feelings would be through the channel of pity. It

was, however, true that her arts had been successful in making him a very good-natured friend, if not the ardent admirer that she hoped he would develop into some day.

'Never mind, Polly. You needn't be so jealous that I've got a young man and you haven't. It's likely enough you'll have a spark of your own some day,' she said. And Mary, remembering a certain good resolution made the evening before, bit back the sharp answer that came on to her tongue.

The two girls went down into the parlour, where Mrs. Turnbull was sitting with Aunt Susan, who had just dropped in. Jem was there too, buried in a book, but he looked up to say—

'What have you done with that birds' nest you had on the top of your head?' and be duly snubbed by Miss Ladbroke.

Turnbull had carried off Malcolm to see the farm, which was rather tiresome of him, as Milly, and, it must be confessed, Mary too, thought. He wasn't going to leave such an intelligent young man to talk to a pack of women, as he said afterwards; and Malcolm's thorough knowledge of farming and keen interest in all the English methods, so fascinated the old man, that he never brought him back till tea was ready. In the meantime there was plenty of talk between the 'women.'

'And how did you come to leave Miss Dennison's, my dear?' Mrs. Turnbull asked; 'so suddenly too! Why, I thought you were going to stay with her anyhow till Christmas.'

'So did I, but I changed my mind,' Milly answered in an off-hand manner. 'There's a new governess come that I didn't like,' after a moment's thought. 'And I believe I shall do much better on my own

account. What Miss Dennison paid me wasn't more than a pittance,—I could get double that salary in some families. I am going to private houses now.'

'Still a pittance is something, and you were kept there. I should have thought it would be wise to stay where you were till you heard of a better place.'

'I don't think I shall be long in finding a *situation*,' replied Milly, with a marked accent on the last word. 'As a nursery governess anyhow, and then one can rise.'

'Of course you must judge for yourself, dear,' Mrs. Turnbull responded meekly. 'I hope you will get a very nice pl— I mean situation, soon.'

'I'm going to get everyone I know to look out for me,' Milly said. 'Aunt Susie will, I know,' and she put that little accent into her voice which had won the old maid's heart. 'If I want help, the first person that I go to is Aunt Susan. It's no use having only kind feelings; you want somebody that has got the gumption to carry a thing through.'

Few people would have supposed that Miss Ladbroke, with her shrewd manner of talking, and those sharp sarcastic ways of hers, was to be reached through flattery, but so it was, and Milly had early learnt just the right way of flattering her. Miss Ladbroke thought herself clever, and she liked the deferential tone that her niece always adopted in speaking to her. Milly used to ask her advice, and, though she never followed it, she had a grateful manner of accepting it when given that made Aunt Susan feel that she looked up to her. Milly began now to consult her as to whether or not she should advertise, and skilfully brought her round to say, to the confusion of Mrs. Turnbull, who had advocated cheaper quarters, that it was quite worth while to

pay a little extra, so as to have a good address to write from, when any lady wanted to engage her.

'There's Miss Fitzjames coming! We'll see what she can do for you,' Miss Ladbroke said, as a young lady appeared upon the path leading to the house. The next minute the squire's daughter had been admitted.

Christabel Fitzjames was a sweet-looking girl of about Mary's age, but as small and fragile-looking, after long years of suffering which had left her still delicate, as Mary was rosy and robust. She took an interest in all her father's people, and had the highest opinion of Mary, and it was for her sake that she responded kindly to Milly's request to be remembered, if she should hear of anyone wanting a governess for young children.

Mary listened to the conversation ill at ease. Milly's vulgarity always stood out most vividly when she was talking to those in a different station from her own. Mary's innate dignity and good taste made her manners with those by birth above her all that could be desired. She no more felt herself lowered by calling Christabel Fitzjames 'Miss' than Christabel did when conversing with a princess by addressing her as 'Your Royal Highness.'

With Milly it was far otherwise. So fearful was she of falling into any such error, and letting a lady imagine that she considered herself inferior to her, that her conversation became unconsciously grotesque. It seemed to Mary that at every other word to-day she said 'Miss Fitzjames,' whereas an equal of Christabel's world would barely have addressed her by name once. Milly's effort at assuming an unconstrained manner resulted in a most evident self-consciousness. She would have been surprised

to know how, throughout the conversation, Miss Fitzjames was making excuses for her want of manners, in the recollection of her having been brought up at a third-rate boarding-school.

'If you hear of anything that would suit me, Miss Fitzjames, you'll think of me?' were Milly's parting words as Christabel rose to go. 'Thank you, Miss Fitzjames.'

Christabel lingered in the garden a few minutes with Mary, promising her some Australian seeds from a packet her naval brother had sent home, and envying her the advanced condition of her sweet-peas. And she left, thinking what a refreshing contrast the 'born lady' Mary was to that 'poor common little cousin of hers who wanted to be so fine.'

CHAPTER III

A BUTTONHOLE AND A SERMON

WHEN Turnbull at last brought Malcolm back to the house, tea was ready, and the young man thought he had never seen a more appetising meal than that which was spread out on the snowy table-cloth. Mary was very particular as to the whiteness of the linen. The enormous loaf of home-made bread, the home-made cake nearly as large, though plain and wholesome, that the boys might not have to be restricted in their indulgence in this Sunday treat, the pats of yellow butter and the plate of water-cresses, the new-laid eggs and the home-cured ham, the jam from strawberries that had grown in the garden, and the honeycomb, matching each other in the cut-glass dishes, gave zest to the appetite produced by his afternoon in the open air.

'And there isn't a thing on the table that's not been made by Mary,' remarked Jem, in response to Malcolm's remark of appreciation, 'except the sugar,' he added truthfully.

Malcolm glanced at the girl who sat at the head of the table, pouring out tea, as it had been her place to do ever since she came to the farm, quickly filling the delicate old-fashioned china cups for the grown-up

people, and the boys' three mugs, before she attacked the great loaf of bread, the cutting of which was always left to her.

'I didn't make the honey!' Mary responded, laughing. 'I'm sure I never should have the patience to. It's quite enough to have to look after the bees. I'm going to make Jem do that for me this year.'

It was always an honour to be entrusted by Mary with anything, and Jem looked positively proud.

'We put everything on Mary, you see,' said Turnbull. 'That's the way with step-parents, isn't it?' as he and his stepdaughter laughed to each other. 'But it's the bees' fault in this case. They're as fierce as can be with the rest of us, and they never sting her, somehow.'

Malcolm remarked that he thought 'it would be a very mean bee that would sting Miss Mary,' at which Mary, who was not accustomed to compliments of that kind, laughed so merrily that the young man felt a little disconcerted.

'I don't know what your whole name is,' he said.

'Mary Copeland. That's all,' her mother replied for her. 'She's not so rich in names as Milly.'

Mary liked her own simple, single name, and did not mind in the slightest when the boys shortened it into Polly or Poll; but Milly's tastes were different.

'Isn't it a shame they would always call me Milly,' she said, 'when I was christened Millicent Violet Theodora?'

'And her brother's name is Albert Marmaduke Robert Percy. Names are cheap,' remarked Jock; an observation with too much point in it, for the parents of Albert Marmaduke Robert Percy and Millicent Violet

Theodora had had very little except names to give their children.

'Have you heard from Robert lately?' Mrs. Turnbull inquired, to turn the subject. When people said things that made other people look as Milly and Aunt Susan were looking that moment, it always made her heart beat.

'Yes, I had a letter from him yesterday,' Milly answered, drawing it from her pocket. She was genuinely fond of her only brother, though she stood in awe of him, as she did of nobody else. 'Robert is getting on splendidly,' she added. 'He expects to be in England again in a year's time, and then he'll be having a ship of his own, and he is going to take me to sea with him.'

'You don't hear of any young lady that's likely to be your sister-in-law?' asked Turnbull, cutting the while a second huge slice of ham and placing it on Malcolm's plate.

'No, thank goodness, though there are plenty of girls who would be glad enough to have him.' And Milly shot a vindictive glance at Mary. When he had last been in England, two years ago, Robert Ladbroke had quite lost his honest, rugged heart to his pretty cousin, and Mary's refusal to take his advances seriously so long as it was possible for her to laugh them off, and the decided '*No*' she had given when this proved of no avail, had ever since rankled in his sister's mind. Milly would not at all have liked to have Mary for a sister-in-law, but that did not prevent her resenting Mary's want of appreciation in refusing him.

'Yes, there are lots of girls that would give their eyes to have Robert,' she repeated.

'Did he say that in his letter?' Jem asked, looking

at her so seriously that it was impossible to say whether the question was in good faith or prompted by mischief.

'Eat your tea, Jem,' said his mother nervously. 'There, I hear the first bell! Finish your cake, or you will be late for church.'

'Shall you stay to go to the service?' Turnbull asked, looking comprehensively at Malcolm and Milly.

She answered for them. 'Yes, that's what we meant to do, isn't it, Mr. Stewart? You should hear Mr. Vincent, they say he's as fine a preacher as many at the smartest churches in London. We always go to church together on Sunday evenings,' she added, turning to her aunt; 'Mr. Stewart is making me quite pious.'

Mary stopped Jem's mouth, which opened wide, from uttering what it intended to, by a nudge under the table, and a simultaneous helping of honey, with the injunction to eat and not to talk.

Although now nearly thirteen, and in general bumptiously inclined, Jem never thought of resisting his sister's authority.

'You had better not go to church this evening, mother,' Mary said, as the party rose from the table, and she placed a cushion in Mrs. Turnbull's chair and a footstool in front of it. 'The breeze is getting up, and it will be quite chilly when we come out.'

'I should have liked to go,' said Mrs. Turnbull meekly.

'And can't you leave your mother to decide for herself?' asked Aunt Susan, who had been very silent at tea, keeping her eyes and ears open, but who now found her tongue.

'I daresay Mary is right,' Mrs. Turnbull hastened to say. 'I did get a little cold last time I went to the

evening service. It's always so crowded, these days, with the people that come over from Exbridge, that the chapel does get hot.'

'Oh, Mary's always right, of course! Are you going to let your father plant the farther field with turnips this year,'—addressing her niece,—'or has it got to be wheat? You'd better go and see now that he's putting on the right pair of boots!'

But Mary did not wait for any more of her aunt's sarcasms. She really had to see that Bobby washed his sticky fingers, and that Jock had not forgotten to put a clean handkerchief in his pocket. She had a buttonhole ready for all the boys; that was part of the Sunday evening routine. There was a bit of geranium for Jem and Bobby, and a rosebud from the plant in her own window for Jock, who was her favourite brother. But Jock decided not to go to church this evening. Secretly more inclined to take care of the little cold in his head that he was promised black-currant tea to cure at night, because he saw that he was not likely to have Mary to himself to walk with, and being given the choice, he said he would stay at home with mother. So there was the buttonhole of a white rosebud and sprig of budding sweetbriar without a recipient.

'You'd better have that, Stewart,' Turnbull said, as Mary offered it to her stepfather. 'I'm too old for these fal-lals, but it would look well in your buttonhole.'

'May I have it, Miss Mary—Copeland?' Malcolm asked. Then Mary had to produce a pin and fasten it in for him, just as she had done Bobby's and Jem's.

'This is just like being at home again!' Malcolm repeated. And he looked as if he very much enjoyed being at home. As they went down the garden-path to the gate together, Malcolm noticed the different

plants, admired the uncommon shades of the wall-flowers, and talked in such an understanding way about gardens and gardening that Mary shared her father's opinion that he was a very intelligent young man.

It was wonderful to him to see blossoms out so early.

'With us,' he said, 'everything is under snow now. We don't get our spring till May, but when spring does come, it doesn't take long about it. There are a few warm days, and the snow melts so fast that the brook between our house and the village is regularly flooded. We have often had to cross it in a boat. And as soon as the snow is off, the buds are out on the trees, and it seems to be summer in no time. I think everything comes quickly to us New Country folk.'

There was something in his tone which corresponded to something in his face when Mary had pinned the rosebud in for him, which gave her a feeling that there was a difference about this man from other men which made him curiously more attractive. She thought that if they were to see much of each other they were likely to become real friends. That was all ; the deep affection formed to last a lifetime did not come to the English girl quite so suddenly as that.

Malcolm used to say afterwards that he fell in love with Mary the first moment he saw her, under the yew-tree arch, with her fresh, smiling face and mass of chestnut hair brushed back from it and coiled behind, in the way that was simplest and neatest and took least time to do, and her blue gingham gown with its snowy collar and cuffs. If it was not actually at that first moment, it was certainly in the course of that first afternoon, as he saw Mary in all the energy and the sweetness of her girlhood, the support as well as the

sunshine of her home, and took in that there was a type of woman of which he had never dreamed. Since his arrival in England Milly was the only girl of whom he had seen enough to enter into friendly relations with. He had met dozens of girls like Milly before, good-natured and good-hearted—for so he thought her—to whom a smart gown and an afternoon's amusement afforded the greatest joy in life, and who understood how to make themselves agreeable to young men. He had known lots of girls like that in St. John, and they were not more scarce in his native village than they are anywhere all over the world, but he had never met anyone like Mary. The 'good' women of his acquaintance all happened to be rather plain, and by no means lively ; the ones who were useful and capable at home, to have no fun about them ; the pretty ones all were vain, and the clever ones all conceited. So at least Malcolm set them down in his own mind, to account for the result it had upon his heart to find all the desirable qualities to be met with in women combined in this one Mary!

While Bobby clung on to one of Mary's hands, as was his acknowledged right on the walk to church, Malcolm walked on her other side, and told her a great deal more about what Canada was like : of the frozen winters, which they on the farm thought almost the best part of the year, because of the long evenings for reading in, to say nothing of the snow-shoe tramps and the sleighing through the crisp air beneath a sky he had never thought until this evening was ever equalled in clearness in England ; and of the hot, luxuriant summer, when the gardens blossomed and bore fruit so quickly and the woods were filled with wild flowers, kinds that Mary had never heard of before, and which he succeeded in making her long to see.

Then Jem came round to the other side, and wanted to hear all about the wild Indians and the bears. He was rather disgusted to find that Malcolm had never been scalped, and that the Indians of New Brunswick did not even wear war-paint, or feathers growing out of their heads, as in the pictures; and that the bears of that region were so tamed down by civilisation that they fed on wild raspberries. But the young Canadian had some thrilling adventures to relate of how he had once been caught on a catamaran between the floes of ice as the river was breaking up, and had just escaped with his life by leaping on to one of the floating ice-masses, while his catamaran was ground to pieces. At this Bobby, who was very tender-hearted, nearly cried, he having supposed that a catamaran was a North American animal, instead of a sort of raft. When its nature had been explained to him, there was plenty more to be told about the river life of the lumber men, who spent the winter in the silent forests cutting down the trees which, with the breaking up of the frost, were set floating down stream; and how, collected together into enormous rafts, they formed the home of the lumber men, who now built their cabins on them, a subject which lasted until the grounds of Avonbridge were reached.

A few minutes more brought the party to the chapel, which was in the grounds of the Hall, and in which the tenants had from time immemorial had their seats assigned. There was a crowd of people waiting in the aisle for places, as it had grown the custom for many to take the pleasant walk across the fields from Exbridge to hear Mr. Vincent, whose reputation as a preacher made people wonder that he was willing for the sake of his delicate father to remain in so retired a position as chaplain in a little country place.

The Turnbulls' seat was filled as full as was comfortable with the six who this evening occupied it, but the farmer, with his usual hospitality, made room for one more, and a quietly dressed girl was squeezed in between himself and Mary. She attracted little attention during the service, except that Mary, who lent her a Prayer-book, observed that she had no idea where to find the places, and, when helped to do so, did not follow the service, at any rate audibly.

Bobby also required to have his hymns and psalms found for him, and it amused Malcolm to notice how determined the little fellow was that no one but Mary should get possession of his book. It was not lost on Malcolm, either, how, when the sermon came, he nestled up to his sister and got hold of her hand with his own little hot one, nor the motherly glance with which she smiled down at him as he leant his head against her arm. Then her eyes turned to the preacher, and remained fixed on his face all through the sermon, in marked contrast to those of the girl beside her, and of Milly, who, in the intervals of sidelong looks at Malcolm, was occupied in appraising the value of Miss Fitzjames's jewelled belt, and gauging the possibilities of having her next new dress produced in the style of that worn by Mr. William Fitzjames's American wife, now a visitor at the Hall. Milly's wandering glances were not, however, noted by Malcolm, for he, too, was listening to the sermon.

Mr. Vincent's style of preaching was so very simple and straightforward that it required either a very simple or a very cultivated person to see how far beyond the common it was in depth and insight. Mary represented the former, and Malcolm the latter, class, and both remained with attention riveted upon the sermon from its beginning to its close.

It was the Fourth Sunday in Lent, and the subject of the sermon, as of the Lessons for the day, was Joseph ; and what gave it at once an especial interest to Mary was the opening portion, in which the preacher referred to Joseph's character as a lad.

'It is not difficult to see what his particular failing was,' said Mr. Vincent,—'conceit.'

The unkind words of Aunt Susan, which had made so much impression on her, returned to Mary's memory, and kept ringing there, as the sermon went on to point out how natural it was that conceit should develop in Joseph. He had the qualities—'dangerous qualities,' Mr. Vincent called them—which were likely to lead to that weakness. Mary wondered afterwards if it was not in itself a proof of conceit in her that each of these qualities as he enumerated them made her think about herself. Joseph was good-looking, he had the gift of making himself popular, he was exceptionally clever,—his whole after career, and the position of importance he gained in whatever circumstances he was placed, showed that,—he was made an immense deal of in his own home. As Mr. Vincent spoke of the marked partiality shown by Jacob to his especial son, and the way he apparently encouraged him to give his opinions on the others, Mary could not but be reminded of the way her father insisted on the boys obeying and waiting upon her, and how ready everybody in the house was to listen to her advice.

Then Mr. Vincent went on to show how the conceit had been 'burnt out of Joseph'—very strong measures having been taken for that—because his was a character that needed, and would stand, strong measures.

'God never gives us more to bear than our strength will stand ; but the harder the discipline we are equal to enduring, the grander will be the result on our

characters, the greater the blessing we shall be able to bring to other people, after we have gone through it,' were words destined to remain in Mary's memory, and be a help to her in days the coming of which she could then but little anticipate. Albeit it did strike her at the time, with what was something like a faint pang of fear, what a very disagreeable process the *burning out* of a person's conceit must be. It certainly had not been pleasant in Joseph's case. First, he was made a servant, which meant in those days a slave, in a heathen country. Being considered to be dead, he would have passed out of the minds and lives of those who had cared for him, as the dead will do except to their very nearest, such as Jacob, who doubtless mourned still, and the thought of whose misery must have added bitterness to Joseph's trial. A slave in a heathen country, that would seem low enough, but Joseph was to be brought lower still! Accused of, and believed guilty of, a sin the imputation of which must have been to Joseph's pure and honourable nature a misery foreshadowing that of Him who, sinless, bore all the vile sins of the world, he was thrown into prison. A slave, in a dungeon in a heathen country, treated at first, as the passage in the Psalms implied, with peculiar severity,—'What a grand foundation there must have been to the character of Joseph!' said the preacher; 'what a glorious faith in his clinging to God, that, instead of being sent to the bad by the treatment he went through, combined with the removal of every softening influence, he came out of the ordeal ennobled and perfected! The iron that had entered into his soul had made him strong instead of hard. What that prison experience had done for him we see in the grand humility of his ascription of his gift of second sight to God, in his utter magnanimity

towards his brethren. Joseph stands out to all time as an example of what a man may become who uses the discipline of God for that purpose for which it has been sent.'

As the congregation moved down the aisle there was a considerable crush. Just as she got into the porch, Mary, feeling for her handkerchief, discovered that that and her purse, which had been with it, were gone.

'My pocket has been picked!' she exclaimed. 'In church too! Who can have done it?'

'The girl who sat next you,' answered Malcolm promptly. 'You run round across the grass and head her, Jem.' And he himself set off as fast as his legs would carry him along the path between two walls through which the worshippers at the chapel made their way out of the grounds. Jem scampered round by a short cut, and it was he who caught the girl at a point where a gravel path led into the wall-enclosed walk. He seized on her, and clung to her arm, in spite of the slaps she dealt him and her efforts to escape, until Malcolm appeared, which was but a few seconds. Then the girl felt her wrists held, not roughly but very firmly, by one strong hand, while another was ready to search her pocket, if she should deny the theft. She did not deny it, however. Finding herself beyond power of escape, she confessed, and waited doggedly to meet her fate, which Malcolm told her she must learn from the woman she had robbed. Mary, who had hastened ahead of the rest of the church-goers, soon came up.

'Here is the thief!' Malcolm said, handing over the purse and handkerchief, which the girl had given up to him. 'I suppose the next thing will be to march this young woman off to the nearest police-station?'

The girl still stood, sullen and defiant. It would not be the first time she had been taken up, and she knew that resistance was useless. Rapidly in her mind she was calculating the probable length of her sentence for this, her fifth conviction, when Mary's voice broke into her gloomy meditations.

'Oh no! Now I have got my purse again, that's all I wanted. Let her go, Mr. Stewart.—Quick, before the others come up! She would be sent to prison for it!'

The thief, released, made a rapid use of her freedom to disappear along the path, while Mary stood looking at the clear sky, a brilliant orange behind the blackness of the trees which stood out against it. The keen breeze blowing on her forehead tossed about the short curly hairs which would not always lie back smooth, and cooled her cheeks refreshingly after the heat inside the chapel. An early thrush sang in a bush above them, and a faint smell of growing things, among which were the fragrant roots of violets, made the twilight air sweet.

'Fancy getting anyone shut up in prison an evening like this!' she said.

There was considerable excitement among relatives and friends as they came up and heard the history of the pocket-picking and dexterous capture of the thief.

'She ought to have been had up,' was the general opinion; in which Jem, a little disappointed at this tame ending to the exciting affair, cordially agreed. But it was just like Polly to let her off. Wait till he caught her at it again, though!

When the high road was entered, the party from Ravenhill Farm sorted themselves into the same order for the return walk that they had done in coming.

Mary was rather silent, her mind being full of the poor girl who had gone to the service with such a base intent, had heard all the sacred words without receiving the slightest impression from them, and had now gone off, in all probability to rob some other person.

When Malcolm asked Mary what she was thinking of, she told him simply.

'Well, it was you who let her free,' he laughed, 'to carry on her trade. She will be able to pick a lot more pockets now, you know!'

'I don't think it would have done her any good going to gaol,' Mary answered. 'I don't see how it can do good to anyone being shut up in prison. I was thinking, in the sermon, how wonderful it was of Joseph to be made humble that way. I am afraid it would have made me ever so much prouder.'

Malcolm had not discovered the defect of pride in Mary's character, and he smiled; but she was not looking at him.

His answer, however, was serious. 'I suppose that would have been the effect on him, if he hadn't been something a good deal out of the common way. I have always liked Joseph,' he added. 'There was such a lot of grit in him.'

'Grit?' Mary said interrogatively. Malcolm laughed.

'That's a Yankee word, but it's a good one. Stuff in him, perhaps you would say. There was a lot "*to* him"; I've heard that expression in England.'

'I suppose there was,—plenty of backbone,—though it had never occurred to me before. I always thought of Joseph as very meek and mild and forgiving, but I see that what Mr. Vincent said is true; for a man like that, with his gifts and his character, it would take a lot of hard work to grow meek.'

The thoughtfulness of the remark and its earnestness struck Malcolm.

'You and my mother would get on together,' he said. 'The Bible lessons she used to give us when we were children were as good as any sermons—even the one we've had to-night; and your Mr. Vincent is a preacher worth taking a three miles' walk to hear.'

When the party reached the farm, Turnbull and his wife cordially invited their two guests to stay to supper, but Milly decided that they should go home at once. She was not pleased with the results of the afternoon. Malcolm had not shown himself off in the way she would have liked—adopting the superior tone she felt his position and education warranted; and he had appeared to be positively taken with Mary, suggesting a danger Milly might have foreseen, but had not, as she had supposed her friend would consider the Turnbulls far beneath him. She would never take him out to Ravenhill Farm again, Milly resolved, and her first care on the walk home was to arrange expeditions for the next three Sunday afternoons, which should take them in far-distant directions from Avonbridge.

Malcolm had been brought up on old Scotch lines, and kept to his early training sufficiently to prefer not making railway excursions on Sunday, but he always liked a long walk, and there were plenty of walks in the neighbourhood of Exbridge, to places with churches in them too, since he liked the evening service, which would lead them far from Mary.

Having made out her plans with the unsuspecting Malcolm, Milly next proceeded to talk about her cousin. This required art, for to disparage another girl openly only made a man think one ill-natured,

while it was important he should be made to know that Mary was not quite the angel he considered her. Milly was as double by nature as Mary was frank and single-minded, and, so far as it is right to give the name of love to a passion so selfish as hers, she was over head and ears in love with Malcolm.

Up to the time of her leaving Miss Dennison's, Milly had not had many opportunities of meeting young men, but she had, on the sly, read dozens and dozens of cheap novels,—cheap as to the thin paper on which they were printed, with miserable little illustrations of such thrilling episodes as Lord Eustace Pendragon denouncing his wife, or Lady Gwendoline de Lacy throwing herself down a precipice ; cheaper still as to the sentiment contained in them and the amount of truth to life attained by their authors, whose incomes were derived from describing scenes and society of which they had had absolutely no experience. These novels had so fostered Milly's naturally sentimental turn, that she could hardly speak to a young man without wondering if he were going to fall in love with her, and had given her so unreal a view of life that she imagined love-making to be the thing of greatest importance in it. It was not surprising, therefore, that when she found herself in the same house with Malcolm Stewart, and with the opportunity of seeing so much of him as her new circumstances permitted, she should quickly have lost her heart to the handsome young man.

Malcolm, however, had no idea of this. His friendliness with her was the same that he had been accustomed to show to any pleasant girl, in the greater freedom of intercourse between young men and women that prevails across the Atlantic. When he paid for

her omnibus fares and her teas, he was only doing what a Canadian young man does as a matter of course, even if he is a gentleman and the girl a lady, if they happen to be together. It would have given him much surprise, not to say a shock, to know that Milly was looking on these, as it seemed to him, everyday courtesies, as special marks of attention to herself, and that she was beginning to wonder hopefully whether he might not have 'intentions.' However this might be, Milly was determined that at least Mary should not have him, and she began her defensive campaign at once.

'What a happy home Mary has! Hasn't she?' Milly began, with a pathetic sigh.

Malcolm responded warmly on the genial atmosphere of the Ravenhill home, adding that he thought Miss Copeland had a good deal to do with the making of the sunshine.

'One shouldn't envy people; I don't think I envy Mary,' Milly proceeded sweetly. 'She and I were brought up together, and I always look upon her as a sister; but it does make one think of one's own position, all alone in the world,—such a contrast.'

'You and your cousin were brought up together, were you?'

'Oh yes, until I was twelve. I thought it was going to be my home always. I'm sure dear Aunt Alice would have been glad to have me, but you see she always gave in to Mary, and . . .' Milly hesitated, as though unwilling to say anything against her cousin. Before proceeding, in fact, she took care to explain how very fond she was and always had been of Mary, after which, with more implications than actual sayings, but leaving no doubt of her meaning, she told Malcolm how far from kind Mary

had been to her. Mary always had got her own way with her mother, and it was owing to her that the orphan cousin was sent away to earn a living, so young, on the hard world.

'Fancy your cousin ever being like that!' exclaimed Malcolm. 'It reminds me of a young girl at home. When she was a child she was a perfect terror, so spoilt there was no doing anything with her. Since she has grown up there has been a lot of trouble in her family; her mother died, and she had to take her place, and it's wonderful the way she's altered. There isn't a nicer girl in the village now. I don't believe spoiling children can be so bad for them as people say,' with a laugh. 'It seems to have turned out well enough in the end in Miss Mary's case!'

This was so exactly the opposite of what Malcolm had been intended to think, that Milly answered quite crossly, and a little off her guard—

'Oh yes, Mary's well enough to talk to, seeing her just like that. But wait till you come to live with her, that's all; then you'd see what her will was like, and her temper too. I pity the man that's going to marry Mary.'

'Is she engaged to be married?' Malcolm inquired quickly, to the fresh upsetting of Milly's good-humour.

'Not that I've heard of. She's too well known at Avonbridge, perhaps. However'—as she became aware of something like astonishment in her companion's face—'I don't want to prejudice you against her,—my own cousin too, that I'm so fond of!' But Malcolm did not answer.

The two reached home less pleased with each other than usual. She was thinking what tiresome creatures

men were, and he was thinking how odd it was that the most good-natured girls — Milly was certainly good-natured, had she not offered to sew a button on to his glove, and even to darn his socks for him? —could not help sometimes being a little spiteful.

CHAPTER IV

MILLY'S NEW FRIENDS

MRS. TURNBULL had been right in thinking the quarters Milly had found for herself rather expensive for her; she had also been right in thinking her niece foolish in leaving Miss Dennison's. But what the foolishness, indeed worse than foolishness, had been which led to that sudden move she did not guess, and Mary had blamed herself for forming the idea that there was something Milly had to be ashamed of over it.

The facts were as follows. Milly's not very valuable services as junior teacher in the 'Young Ladies' School' had not been paid for at a higher rate than they were worth. If the girl was lodged and kept, and had enough given her to pay for her dress, that was as much as she ought to expect, Miss Dennison thought, particularly after being taken on 'special terms' for so many years; but, unfortunately, her ideas of what it would take to pay for the dress of a girl in that position were widely different from those entertained by Milly. The 'pittance' proved a great deal too small to provide the young teacher with those wonderful hats and mantles to wear which she considered the chief prerogative of being a governess.

Milly was one of the many people whose purchases

are guided not by what they can afford, but what they 'must have,' and for the last few years she had lived beyond her means. She had bills at all the drapers' and milliners' shops in the place where they would trust her, and she eked out her income by the perpetual borrowing of small sums of money from the schoolgirls, which very seldom were repaid. This had gone on for a long time, when one of the girls, a young lady of some importance in the establishment, her father being a man of means and she a parlour-boarder, made a stand, and declared that if Miss Ladbroke did not return her the thirty shillings to which her borrowings at last amounted, she should go and tell Miss Dennison. To pay her back then and there was impossible, for Milly had not three shillings in her possession. In vain she threatened and cajoled, Miss Amelia Perkins was determined. The whole matter was laid before Miss Dennison, and then ensued what was described at Girton House as a 'scene.'

Miss Ladbroke and Amelia were confronted before Miss Dennison, and not even the presence of the head of the establishment prevented them from expressing to each other their minds. Miss Amelia Perkins denounced Miss Ladbroke as a mean and dishonest woman, who screwed all she could out of the poor girls, and threatened them if they dared to tell; 'as bad,' said she, 'as a regular common thief, and with much more to be ashamed of,' and the kind of person who was a disgrace to the school. Milly, on the other hand, asserted that Amelia was a mean, grasping, underhand tell-tale, taking advantage of having a rich father to back her up in abusing and maligning a poor orphan. But the poor orphan was not going to stand Miss Perkins's insults. Nothing would induce her to

remain under the same roof to be badgered and back-bitten by a conceited schoolgirl, and if Miss Dennison did not make Amelia apologise for the way in which she had just spoken, she should not demean herself by staying one night longer in the house.

Milly went up to her room, and waited to see what would happen. She waited a long time, during which she thought of a great many other crushing things which she wished she had uttered at the time, to display her elevation of soul, and then something did happen.

Miss Dennison, who had been all this time endeavouring to appease the righteous wrath of the parlour-boarder, came up, not to tell Milly that Amelia was to apologise to her, but that she must come down this minute and apologise to Amelia! Under no other circumstances, Miss Perkins had said, would she refrain from writing to her father, asking him to remove her immediately, a disaster not to be contemplated.

'Me apologise to that girl!' exclaimed Milly, forgetting her grammar under the stress of the situation. 'Never! And I'm surprised that you should ask it of me, Miss Dennison. Never!' she repeated. 'And I'll pack my box this evening, and say good-bye to you without a tear,'—which was the way the heroine of the novel she was just reading expressed herself when turning her back upon her oppressors. 'The day may come when you'll be sorry you've harrowed the heart of a poor unprotected girl!'

Miss Dennison was sorry about the whole affair, for she was a kind-hearted woman. She had never succeeded in making her establishment in any way first-rate; but when it came to choosing between a

rather inefficient teacher, whose salary, small as it was, was an expense that might be cut down, and a parlour-boarder who had held out hopes that friends of hers might join her there next term, if she could make herself happy at the school, there was no question which of the two must go.

'If you will come down and tell Amelia you are really sorry, and promise to pay her back what you borrowed as soon as your salary comes in, I think she will take the apology, and I shall be able to keep you,' Miss Dennison said; 'and I do not mind advancing you the thirty shillings for this once; but if not, you will certainly have to go. I will give you the salary which would be due to you at the end of the quarter, and I should like you to leave me as soon as you can find another place. I don't mean a situation, but a respectable house where you can lodge. Perhaps your relatives at Avonbridge would take you in. I will write to them myself, if you like,' she added kindly.

But Milly's pride demanded no concessions. She was determined to act up to the ideal of Daphne de la Poer, when she was spurned by her purse-proud employers, on their discovery that she had won the affections of their only son. That very evening she went out in search of a temporary home, and came back proudly to Girton House with a cab to carry off her luggage, received her quarter's salary with a heroic disdain of manner that nearly equalled Daphne's impracticable precedent of refusing to touch one base coin from the hands of the arrogant Lord Douglas, and drove away, leaving the very superior address 'Pernambuco Lodge,' with all the young ladies of the establishment gazing at her departure from behind the curtains.

Different sorts of soil bring forth different sorts of weeds. The weed of pride in Mary's case was the overgrowth of spirit and self-reliance. With Milly it was the outcome of vanity and self-esteem, which are qualities of so blinding a nature that she actually left the house where she had cheated the girls, taken refuge from their accusations in injurious words, and declined with haughty ingratitude the offers of one who had always treated her kindly, imagining that she had come out finely from the transaction, and congratulating herself on her exhibition of independence!

Boarding at Pernambuco Lodge proved a more expensive affair than Milly had expected when she engaged her room there. A number of extras appeared in her bill, for which she had not been prepared; and the other boarders, all of whom were in much better circumstances than Milly, dressed so smartly that she had to wear her Sunday gown as an everyday one and buy another at once for Sundays. The five pounds with which she had left Miss Dennison's melted away quickly, and if it had not been for the presence of Malcolm, Milly would probably not have remained beyond the first fortnight. Apart from her unwillingness to leave the house where he was, she could not go into cheaper quarters without showing him and all the other boarders how poor she was, and as she had spoken at first as if money was no object to her, this would be doubly humiliating. So she determined to use every means to procure a situation as soon as possible, and asked Miss Sheridan to trust her for a week or so, that she might go straight to her employment, and leave an impression of opulence behind her.

To find a situation, however, proved much more difficult than Milly had anticipated. Out of fifteen advertisements she answered, only one person replied

to her letter. This lady said that there had been forty-three applicants for the post she offered. She wanted a young lady who would teach, and wash and dress, and make the clothes for her three little children, and would not mind assisting in the light work of the house and playing the organ on Sundays. She must be firm, yet patient, thoroughly capable of teaching the subjects that she professed, and produce the highest references. A happy home was offered, and the salary was ten pounds.

Ten pounds! That was worse than Miss Dennison's, where Milly had received fifteen, and had not been expected to wash and dress anybody! Still, with not a penny in her pocket, and a week's board already owing for, Milly could not be particular. She wrote back saying that she would accept the situation, and giving her references; but she never heard again, one of the other forty-three having been chosen.

She had put down her name at a registry office, and this led in time to her having a notice to write to a lady wanting a nursery governess for two children; the salary here would be twenty pounds, and there would be 'no menial work.' Milly's spirits rose high. She wrote at once, enclosing, as requested, her photograph. An answer came by return of post, with the likeness enclosed. Lady Fitzroy thought Miss Ladbroke was not the kind of person she was looking for, and added she was already suited.

Then Milly advertised herself, but had no applications whatever. The prospect of getting work seemed small. Why had not she been born with the means of spending a life of enjoyment, instead of having to earn her own living? It would have suited her so much better! Of this she was the more convinced, when a pair of new boarders came to Miss Sheridan's whose existence

seemed to Milly of the most desirable kind on earth. They had nothing to do, and plenty of money for everything they wanted. They could sit down and read novels in easy-chairs the whole morning, and spend an hour over their toilets, and go walking, and even driving, about, and shopping, the whole afternoon. If they wanted anything, they bought it; if they wanted to go anywhere, they went.

These young ladies — both terms being used by courtesy, not as a strict definition of facts—took very much to Milly, and greatly honoured she felt thereby. They called her, 'You dear little thing!' and asked her to call them by their Christian names — or rather nicknames, of Tiny and Toto — before they had been three days in the house. When they found that Milly was looking out for a situation as governess, they seemed quite surprised and very pitiful. They entered into the subject with interest, however, and gave her a lot of good counsel. The great thing, they said, was to be sure one got into a really nice family, where one could have a little fun, and not be mewed up all day in a schoolroom. They knew a governess who was taken to the Riviera every winter by her employers, and always allowed two or three hours to herself in the day, to do as she liked in.

And another point was to stand out for a respectable salary. They would not advise her to go anywhere under fifty pounds a year, forty at the very lowest. A cousin of theirs who had not got on with her stepmother, and wanted to leave home, — so low a reason as being obliged to earn a living not being of course connected with any of their family,—had taken a position as finishing governess to one girl. She began with seventy pounds. It was such a good thing to start like that.

Milly was ashamed to say that her ambition had not soared beyond the position of nursery governess, while agreeing without difficulty that it would be very nice to begin with seventy pounds a year. Would the Miss Simpsons look out for her? Of course they would! And in the meantime, while she was free, she had better make the most of her opportunity in enjoying herself. Couldn't she bicycle? Oh, she must learn to do so! She could easily hire a machine, and there was a man in Exbridge who taught splendidly. Lessons expensive? Oh no, they did not think he charged more than a shilling an hour.

It was so very gratifying to be considered a person of such affluence that shillings were nothing to her, that Milly was ashamed to demur on the score of expense. At the same time she had nothing in her purse, and she was obliged to ask if her friends thought the bicycle man would trust her. Of course he would, they answered, if they went with her; which they did, and encouraged Milly in her early efforts. Milly half hoped that they might offer to pay for the suggested lessons, but their good-nature did not go quite so far as that. Indeed, in spite of their large way of speaking, and the expensive dresses they wore, and the fact of their occupying the best rooms in the house, it never occurred to them to spend any of their money on their 'dear little Milly.'

What they did do was to foster everything in the poor girl that was foolish, vain, and frivolous. They 'chaffed' her in the silliest way about Malcolm, who they assured her was her devotee; they recommended additions to her wardrobe which made her unpaid bills continually longer; they lent her books of a kind worse than any she had read before. Those of her own choosing had been simply very silly; these were

actually bad in tone, confusing and upsetting her not too firmly rooted principles of honour and integrity.

At more and more frequent intervals Milly went to the registry office, to ask if Mrs. Bond had not heard of something for her yet.

'Is there nothing at all on your books that I could try for?' she asked one day, in a tone so melancholy that Mrs. Bond looked at her with compassion.

'I've plenty on my list,' she answered; 'but I don't see one that is likely to suit you. Everyone wants so much now. Most of them expect certificates, and you haven't passed the Cambridge, have you? There's a nice opening, just the thing for you, if you had. "Good music—Violin"'— as she ran her eye down her list— 'that's no use.—"Fluent French and German acquired abroad"—"Calisthenics and Swedish gymnastics"— No, I am afraid I have nothing at all that's any good for you to-day.' And Mrs. Bond closed her book and turned to a more promising customer. Milly went away with a dejected heart. She had nearly got home, when she discovered that she had left her umbrella at the registry office. She retraced her steps, and when she got back there was a more cheering expression on Mrs. Bond's face.

'I have just heard of something,' she said, 'that I think might suit you. "Mother's Help" to a Mrs. Collins. She lives in Grove Cottages—there's the address. If I were you I would go round and see her at once. Everything is snapped up so quickly.'

Milly accordingly went, not stopping to ask any questions, as a lady in a sealskin jacket was waiting to be attended to by Mrs. Bond.

Grove Cottages were on the unfashionable side of Exbridge. They were very small houses indeed, and Mrs. Collins came to the door herself when Milly

knocked for admittance. She had one baby in her arms, and a second was lying in a cradle in the small sitting-room into which Mrs. Collins took Milly. She was a very delicate woman, whose husband had lately lost the whole of his private income, reducing them from comparative affluence to a condition of poverty.

'I cannot afford to keep a servant now,' said Mrs. Collins; 'and for some months before the twins were born I did all the work of the house myself, but I am not equal to that now. My husband is going off next week to the Cape Colony, where he has a brother who thinks there would be an opening for him, and I shall be so lonely all by myself that I thought it would be pleasant if I could find a young lady who would help me with the children, taking them out, and so on. I shall have a charwoman in to do the rough cleaning; there would not be any real hard work, but perhaps'—as she glanced at Milly's face and then at her smart clothes—'it isn't quite the kind of situation you were looking for.'

'No, it isn't. I was wishing to be a governess. What salary do you offer?'

'I cannot offer as much as I should like. I thought fourteen pounds a year. You would be treated just as one of the family.'

Milly considered. To such straits was she reduced, so hopeless seemed the prospect of ever getting any suitable employment, that she almost inclined to take this situation, miserable as it was, and hateful as the life sounded, until she could hear of a better; but the thought of her feelings when she had to confess to the Simpsons that she had taken a 'position'—the word they used—at one of Grove Cottages made it seem out of the question. She imagined what it would be to meet them as she was wheeling about Mrs. Collins's

twins in their 'pram.' It would be impossible to pretend that she was a governess to children of two months old!

'I'm very sorry, Mrs. Collins, but I'm afraid the situation won't suit me,' she said, rising with dignity. 'It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to.'

'No,' answered Mrs. Collins, as Milly drew down her spotted veil. 'I think it is a homelier sort of person I want.'

So there was an end of that!

CHAPTER V

THE DAWN OF LOVE

IT was Easter Monday, a cloudless day, as warm as many in June, but with just enough breeze to make the weather, although unseasonable, delightful with its promise of the coming summer.

Mary was very busy in her garden this afternoon. There was always so much to be done at this time of year. With a big sun-bonnet on, and a large blue apron, she was occupied in fastening a length of black cotton from stick to stick over the row of young sweet-peas, on whose juicy sprouts the sparrows cast greedy glances, when the garden gate clicked and in came Malcolm. He was by himself; there was no Milly with him, which did not render his visit less welcome.

'Good-afternoon, Miss Copeland.' He held out his hand. Mary put hers behind her, laughing.

'I've been weeding,' she said, 'and I'm dreadfully dirty. Will you come inside? Father and mother have driven into Exbridge, but I am expecting them back before long,—if you don't mind waiting,' she added.

Malcolm did not mind waiting in the least, but he did not seem to want to go inside. Mightn't he stay out with Mary and help her? There was nothing he

enjoyed so much as working in a garden. With his aid the black thread was soon arranged in symmetrical lines, and Jock announced that he heard the sparrows say in their angry twitter, 'What nasty mean creatures you are! But I'll pay you out by eating all your cherries by and by!'

'I wish worms would attend to black cotton,' Mary said, as she straightened herself up with the reel in her hand. 'I don't know how to prevent their eating the mignonette seeds; it seems hardly worth while sowing mignonette, it never comes to anything.'

'Have you tried mixing lime with the soil?' suggested Malcolm. 'That's the thing to do. Old mortar or anything of the kind will answer the purpose.'

Two minutes later he and Mary were busy with spades and a bucket, scraping together the earth at the foot of a newly built bit of wall, exchanging information the while on methods of circumventing the various garden pests. Malcolm knew the names and the wickedness of the multifarious insect criminals which make their prey of roses, and, what was still more to the point, the best antidotes to their bad practices.

Malcolm insisted on taking off his coat and digging up the bed where the mignonette seeds were to go; that was much too hard work for her, he said; at which she laughed. Malcolm liked to see Mary laugh, the dimples in her cheeks were so pretty.

They sowed the mignonette together when the stones had been gathered out by Jock and the lime dug in, and finally there was a watering, after which they all surveyed the neat bed, and Malcolm remarked it would be 'real mean' of the mignonette if it did not do well that year. After this the workers strolled round the garden to cool themselves, and for Mary to benefit

by more of Malcolm's valuable hints. His admiration was roused by a bed of primroses, to Jock's contempt.

'Those are only wild flowers,' he said. 'There are heaps of them all about.'

'Well, I've never seen a primrose growing wild,' Malcolm responded. 'We have plenty of spring flowers you haven't, but we don't get primroses, or sweet violets either, except a tiny white kind that grow in damp places, and they have quite a different smell.'

'Let's take Mr. Stewart to Fisher's Hollow,' exclaimed Jock. 'There are plenty of violets there, and primroses too. Do let's, Polly! You know it's a holiday.'

'Would you like it?' Mary asked, turning to Malcolm frankly. 'There's the gig! We shall be having tea now, and after that we should be pleased to take you there.'

Malcolm would like nothing better, though he hesitated about staying to tea. The Turnbulls, however, so warmly begged him to 'take pot luck' and share that meal, that he was quickly persuaded to do so. He would have liked to help Mary lay the table, but he did not quite feel enough at home to offer to do this, so contented himself with watching her quick light movements, unconsciously graceful, and those dimples which showed themselves almost as often as he caught sight of her round pink cheeks.

'How is my niece Milly?' asked Mrs. Turnbull, as they took their seats round the table. 'I was meaning to ask her to stay here, but what with the cleaning and all, it did not seem to come convenient. And I fancy she wants to be in the town, so as to look out for a situation.'

'I think she's all right,' answered Malcolm. 'She has taken up very much with two Miss Simpsons who have come to the house lately. I don't imagine she has found a situation yet, but perhaps she is not in a hurry. I think she is having a good time with these new friends.'

'I hope they're nice people, likely to be profitable acquaintances for her?' asked Mrs. Turnbull.

Malcolm did not know much about the Miss Simpsons, for he had never taken to the new-comers, and exchanged as few words with them as possible, but not considering himself responsible for Milly, it had been rather a relief to him when they took her up, and left her less exclusively on his hands. Malcolm was a thoroughly honourable man, who would not for the world have engaged a girl's affections with no intention of going further. The idea of marrying for many years yet he considered out of the question. He had come to England to make money, not to increase indefinitely the necessity for spending it. And if he had been meaning to marry, it would certainly not have been a girl like Milly. He had even put off, indefinitely, one of the Sunday expeditions she had planned for them to take together, and gone for a walk with a man friend instead. These symptoms had not been lost on Milly; but, unfortunately, the wish being father to the thought, she translated them to mean increasing depth of feeling for her, which made him afraid to trust himself too much in her company. She had persuaded herself that it was poverty only which prevented Malcolm from offering himself to her,—a view fostered by the judicious Miss Simpsons, who saw the pleasure it gave to their young friend, and who were amused with her simplicity. Malcolm did not even know what Miss Ladbroke was doing with herself to-day, but fancied—after a moment

to recall it—that she had said something about going to see her aunt.

Mr. Stewart was certainly not Milly's 'young man' in the sense in which she had intended them to imagine, thought Mary. And she was ashamed of herself, to find how much satisfaction she derived from the thought. Why could she not be sweet and amiable, like her mother, and want everybody to have just what they wished? It would be so good for Milly too, to have a sensible man like Malcolm Stewart for a husband, as Mrs. Turnbull had been saying last evening. But for all that, Mary did not want her to have Malcolm!

While tea was proceeding, the weather was undergoing a rapid change. By the time the meal was over the western sky was a mass of grey clouds, with lurid pink patches beneath them, and sharp outlines which Turnbull said betokened thunder. Hardly had he spoken when a low growl was heard. The sun shone for a moment, making all the green in the landscape a brilliant metallic tint, then disappeared, and it grew quickly almost dark. Nothing made Mary nervous, and her cheerful self-possession through the terrific storm which followed prevented her mother from giving way to her terror, as she would otherwise have done.

'We shan't be able to go and get primroses,' said Jock ruefully.

'And you won't be able to go back to Exbridge,' added Turnbull, addressing Malcolm. 'You'll have to stay the night here.'

Malcolm protested that he was made of neither sugar nor salt, but Mrs. Turnbull told him that if he did not care about his bones, on which a soaking might entail permanent rheumatism, he ought to think about his clothes, which being both his best

and lightest, were certainly not adapted to withstand the elements.

Perhaps Malcolm was not loath to be persuaded. At any rate it was so that he accepted the invitation, and much did his presence enliven the evening at the farm. It was the custom for one of the boys to read aloud while the women worked. Mrs. Turnbull and Mary enjoyed the reading, and it did not interfere with the father's nap; the book was produced as a matter of course by Jock.

'Shall I read?' asked Malcolm. 'I should like to feel I was doing something for my living. We read aloud by the hour at home in winter. My father is a great man for books.'

Malcolm's reading proved a very different thing from that of Jock, who had an original way of his own of pronouncing long words, and even Jem's, which was rather of a painstaking than talented order. There was a strain of Spanish blood in Malcolm from some generations back, which gave a touch of poetry to his sturdy Scotch character. He read with so much spirit, and variety of expression and intonation, that he positively kept Turnbull awake instead of sending him to slumber.

How comfortable they had contrived to make him, the guest saw and appreciated when, at ten o'clock, the whole family went to rest, and he found himself the occupant of a pleasant, sloping-roofed, wainscoted room, with everything about it as spotless as it was sure to be in that house, and all that he would require for the night put ready without his having even been asked what he would want.

Mary went to her room too, and sat down by her window. It was not raining just now; there was a break in the clouds through which the moon, just

past the full, shone down. Ten o'clock was later than the Turnbulls generally went to bed. Their day began early, and they usually retired at nine. But Mary did not feel sleepy. Thoughts were busy in her mind of a kind that had never occupied it before, for they came of a new-born feeling. That feeling had sprung into life with the look in Malcolm's eyes as they rested, perhaps unconsciously, upon her face, when he told his hosts collectively that he had never had such a good time as he had that day on any holiday he could remember.

Hitherto Mary had considered love-making something which had no connection with her most serious thoughts. Even when Robert had proposed to her, and she had been obliged to refuse him, though she had been very sorry for the incident, she had not considered the affair as one of much gravity. No young man had ever made her heart beat the faster, or moved in her the slightest desire for coquetry. But with this man it was different, as Mary's honest nature could not hide from itself.

Then her thoughts flew to Milly. Mary had known girls who tried to attract the admirers of others. She had denounced such conduct with the unmitigated severity of youth. What if, after all, she might have something to do with the cooling-off Malcolm had displayed towards her cousin? That Milly was actually in love with him, Mary's quick eyes had seen. If she was in love with him, and there were any likelihood of his friendliness with Milly developing into a stronger feeling, would it be kind, even honourable, for her to stand in the way?

When Milly told Malcolm that it was Mary's doing that she lost her home with her aunt, she had grossly exaggerated; still, it had been mainly because the

girls did not get on together that Mrs. Turnbull had encouraged Milly early to consider the question of making a livelihood for herself. Life on the farm would not have suited Milly in the least, but there was something forlorn about the girl's lonely state which Mary felt should have aroused more compassion and tenderness in her heart towards her.

In his sermon yesterday Mr. Vincent had said that every Easter one ought to take a new step upwards in the spiritual life. Here was the step she ought to take, but it was not an easy one. Arrived at the bottom, it looked appallingly high; had not Mr. Vincent said this was sure to be the case? Like the great steps up the Pyramids, the only way to mount it was on one's knees; and that was the way Mary took. When her prayer ended, Mary stayed still in the same position.

Anything to do with a question of love—of love as yet unspoken—seemed almost too light a subject for prayer; yet it did not feel a light thing to her. It was a thing that now formed part of her life, and no part of her life could be lived apart from Him who gave it to her. So, very simply, though with hot cheeks at thus mentioning his name, Mary asked that the friendship between her and Malcolm might be blessed, and that the intercourse between them should be according to God's will.

The storm had cooled the air, and there was a fresh breeze blowing the masses of broken cloud across the sky when Malcolm woke next morning, to wonder for a moment where in the world he was, and the next to take in with a great throb of pleasure that he was under the same roof with Mary.

That was her voice down in the yard below. 'Chuck, chuck, chuck!' She was feeding the hens,

who, earlier risers even than she, were always ready for their breakfast at six o'clock. Malcolm dressed hurriedly and hastened downstairs. The crisp, fresh air seemed full of life and work and energy. Everything and everybody was astir; even the raindrops shook on the leaves. Mary had done her whole round of feeding now, and was on her way to skim the milk when she and Malcolm met. How fresh and sweet she looked in her cotton gown!

'Where are you going to?' . . . 'my pretty maid,' he felt inclined to say, but would not for anything that she should think him impertinent.

'To the dairy,' she answered.

'May I come with you?' He wondered if she remembered the nursery rhyme, as her eyes danced while she answered him, not 'Yes, if you please,' but, 'No, thank you, I never allow anyone to have a hand in the butter but myself.'

Mary was as certain that Malcolm could not help her in the dairy as he was certain that he could, and, as the dairy was her domain, it was her decision that had to prevail.

'I want to do something rural!' he said, as Mary was vanishing into her cool seclusion. 'It makes me feel badly to see everyone so busy and not to be of any use.'

'You shouldn't have come down till breakfast-time, then; we don't expect town gentlemen to be so early. But if you really feel you must be doing something, you can dig up that flower-bed we were looking at yesterday, where I am going to have carnations.'

At this Mary vanished, and no more did Malcolm see of her till she took her place at the head of the breakfast-table, his own seat being given him beside

Turnbull, an arrangement which pleased the brothers, who sat one on each side of Mary, better than it did Malcolm; and it was her brothers and her father and her mother who engrossed the greater part of Mary's attention this morning. In fact, Malcolm had not so much to say for himself as the night before, and he did not appear quite so interested in the question of ensilage as Turnbull expected him to be when he started that topic.

When breakfast was over Malcolm took his leave. Just as he was going Mary came towards him with a bunch of jonquils and a posy of violets. Malcolm's face lit up with a pleasure which was a little dashed by Mary's words as she put them into his hands.

'Will you give these to Milly,' she said, 'with my love, and tell her we want her to come out and pay us a long visit? You can give the message from mother, of course, but the flowers are from me; and don't forget my love.'

'Oh no, I won't forget it,' Malcolm answered, rather proudly. There was something in Mary's manner which forbade him asking if he might not keep one flower for himself.

Mary's simple efforts at keeping him at a distance would not have deceived a man of the world, though they would probably have been put down as coquetry; but Malcolm was as simple, in his way, as Mary, and he went away a little saddened.

'Of course there is nothing in me to make her like me,' he said to himself, as he walked across the fields back to Exbridge. 'I wonder if I bored her with all that information last night.' His sisters sometimes told him that he was 'too informing.' 'However, I suppose it's as well,' he added mentally, with a sigh. 'It couldn't have been for a long time yet.'

At that moment the first love-sigh Mary had ever known was being choked down, as she stood in front of the flower-bed that had been so beautifully dug and raked and stoned, and tried not to wish there were no such person as Milly in the world. Mary had no time to waste in sentimentalising, however. This was washing-day, and there was a heap to be got through. She turned with quick footsteps to the house. At the door she was met by Turnbull; there was a troubled look on his face.

'What is the matter, father?' Mary asked, glancing at a letter he held in his hand. 'No bad news, is there?'

'Well, yes. Pretty considerably bad news. My poor sister has written to me that they're in a terrible way. There seems to be a regular smash-up of James's business, and they're expecting the brokers in the house. It has been coming on some time, it seems, but he kept it very close, hoping things would be tided over. And now there is no hiding matters any longer. They are positively ruined. James is ill himself too, laid up in bed, and the doctors think very badly of him.'

'You've not told mother?'

'No.'

'That's right. Let's think what we can do about it,' as they went into the house together. 'I suppose you will have to send them money?'

'There's not much I can do that way,' answered Turnbull, looking still more troubled. 'The fact is, I sent them twenty pounds at the beginning of the year. I didn't tell you, for I thought that you'd be vexed, Mary.'

The deprecatory tone of the broad man's voice, and the penitent look in his eyes as they met those of his young stepdaughter, would have made a humorist

laugh; but to Mary it was no laughing matter. A long consultation followed upon this new and unwelcome addition to their anxieties.

To offer the Loves a home at the farm seemed the only practicable way of meeting the situation, but, apart from the important question of expense, the house was too small to take in three fresh people unless somebody turned out. And who could turn out except Mary? Nobody, as she herself pronounced bravely, though Turnbull was loath enough to be convinced of this.

'The Loves must come here, and I must go,' were her final words, as their talk came to an end. 'That delicate woman and those two young girls can't be left without a home. You have kept me long enough, father. It is time I went out now and earned my own living.'

All through the day, whenever a few minutes of some quiet occupation gave her the opportunity for thought, Mary was grappling with the problem of her duty under these altered conditions. She did not want to leave her home at all. And if she did leave it, what was she to do? She had not been educated for a governess. She had not, in fact, been trained for anything but the work of the home, and would have to begin at the bottom of some ladder. Clever as she was with her needle, as a dressmaker she would require to pass several years' apprenticeship before she could begin to earn anything. She did feel herself capable of managing a household, she had had enough experience in that, but she was hardly likely to get a post as housekeeper at twenty.

A dozen other professions occurred to her before she went downstairs to make tea; but to each one there was some insuperable drawback, in most cases that

of the training needed before the calling grew lucrative. If Mary had known of the situation of 'mother's help' which had been proposed to Milly, she might have offered herself for that; but Milly had not let anyone know of its having been even suggested to her that she should fill a position so humble.

From teatime up to bedtime there was too much active work to do for Mary to have time for thinking; but her prayers that night were longer than usual, and when she laid her head down on her pillow, she did not fall asleep, as was her wont, but lay awake thinking of the future. As she thought over again of all the possible means of earning a livelihood, it seemed to Mary that the only practical opening for her, the only one for which she was at present fitted, and in which she could immediately begin to increase the family resources, was that of domestic service. She who could so well train others to do the work of a house, was certainly capable of doing the work herself, and well. The idea of becoming a servant was not at all congenial to her,—Aunt Susan must have been right about her pride!— but what was congenial was not the question.

The thought of Joseph flashed upon Mary's mind and braced her up, and then another thought still more invigorating—

'Who took upon Himself the form of a servant.'

Surely she was not too proud to follow Him!

In the meantime Malcolm was making his way across the fields back to Exbridge. He was there an hour before it was time to be at the Bank, and his first action was to go to the best ironmonger's in the place and buy the most expensive syringe there was in the shop, a different thing, as Jem remarked afterwards

approvingly, from the old one, which squirted all the water out at once, until it got too stupid to do even that. This was a very superior instrument. He also picked out a nice pair of rose scissors and a little garden fork, more convenient to use than the big long-handled one he had discovered was the only one Mary possessed. These he sent out to her at once, and wrote a note therewith which was quite superfluous, considering all he had said in the way of thanks before he left the farm. But his letter and his present made a bright spot in a decidedly gloomy day.

When Malcolm presented the flowers to Milly with the message entrusted to him, she received them not too graciously.

'I see through Miss Mary well enough!' she said to herself, astutely. 'She thinks she'll get me out of Malcolm's way, does she?—Or perhaps she thinks if I'm staying at the farm he'll be coming out to see me, and then she'll have a chance of cutting me out.' Which considerations caused the silly girl to refuse Mrs. Turnbull's invitation in a not over-grateful letter addressed to Mary, which contained also a suggestion that if the Turnbulls really wanted to help her, they might send her a present of something more substantial than flowers.

After this, Mary slipped down her step, and remained at the bottom of it for some hours. Then she scrambled up it again, with the consideration that easy things weren't worth the doing, and that if Milly were a nice girl, there would be no difficulty in loving her. And it was a comfort certainly, just now, that she was not coming to stay.

It was about a fortnight after this that Milly's long and anxious waiting was brought to an end in so brilliant a way, that she congratulated herself not a

little on having declined the situation of 'mother's help' at 5 Grove Cottages. A family acquainted with the Fitzjameses had just taken a house in Exbridge, and told their friends they were looking out for a daily nursery governess for their eldest two children, aged five and six. Mrs. Bridger was particular as to whom she engaged, and did not care to go to a registry office; perhaps Christabel knew of someone likely to suit her. What they wanted was a nice girl whom people they knew could recommend, not a lady; she would simply have charge of the children all day, and give them a little elementary teaching.

Christabel at once remembered her promise to Mary's cousin—it was in that capacity she thought of, and alone took interest in, Milly. It would have rather hurt Milly's feelings, had she known that the 'not a lady' was the main point in the requirements of Mrs. Bridger which made Christabel think of her as likely to be suitable.

This stipulation was not mentioned, however, in the letter Miss Fitzjames's companion wrote for her to Milly, though there was one sentence in that letter which offended the recipient:—'You will not mind my saying that I think you will make a more favourable impression on Mrs. Bridger if you go to her house very quietly dressed.' After the description she had heard of Milly's Sunday hat, Miss Mason thought it only kind to make this suggestion. It was well she did so, for, as it was, Milly's costume, when she presented herself at Mrs. Bridger's, was not what that lady thought very suitable.

'However, the girl won't often be seen,' Mrs. Bridger said to herself. And, having a great many matters to settle, she was inclined to bring this one to a conclusion immediately. So she then and there

engaged Miss Ladbroke, and promised to give her thirty-five pounds a year.

This was not the same as forty, with residence provided, but it sounded very like it, and an immense advance on the fifteen pounds Milly had been receiving at Miss Dennison's. It was only when she came to calculate how much would be left after deducting the twelve shillings a week—which was the lowest Miss Sheridan would take for room, breakfast, and supper—that Milly began to take in that her available income had not been increased.

Even so, she was in a much grander position as 'governess' in a wealthy and aristocratic family than as under-teacher in Miss Dennison's school, and the whole house was soon acquainted with the excellent situation which had been offered to her. The Miss Simpsons were loud in their congratulations.

'Now you will be able to buy a bicycle,' they said. 'It's really much the best plan, for even a shilling an hour mounts up in time.'

It did indeed, as Milly discovered to her cost, when Wheeler Brothers' bill came in that day for £1, 17s. 6d., a little account which they would be pleased if she would settle, their terms being cash. But that included the lessons, her friend Miss Tiny pointed out to her, of which she would want no more.

'Anyhow, you'll be able to pay it now, easily enough,' they said.

That afternoon Milly met Mrs. Collins pushing her twins along in a very shabby 'pram.' She smiled and nodded, and Milly stopped to hope, in an amiable tone, that she had found somebody to suit her.

'No, I haven't; not anyone that I liked. Had you been thinking that perhaps you'd be willing to try it for a little?' Mrs. Collins asked. She had taken

to Milly, as some people did, though other people used to wonder why. That gave Milly her opportunity.

'Oh no,' she replied, smiling in such a patronising way that she saw it had the crushing effect intended on her would-be employer. 'I have been recommended by Miss Fitzjames of Avonbridge Hall to some friends of hers, Colonel and Mrs. Bridger, who have just taken Rochester House, and I have accepted a position with them as governess to their children. I am afraid,' with a final thrust, 'you won't find it easy to meet with a *lady* who will do the kind of work that you expect of her. It seems to me what you are looking out for is a general servant.'

And she went on her way with a sense of exaltation which made up for many humiliated moments during the past six weeks.

CHAPTER VI

MARY FIGHTS APOLLYON

MALCOLM was not long in calling again at Ravenhill Farm, and his visits continued as frequent as they were welcome to every member of the family. The conscientious effort that Mary had made to keep him at a little distance had taken effect, in his coming out to the farm oftener than might otherwise have been the case. If he had had reason to think that his affection was reciprocated by Mary, it would have behoved him to question how far he would be right in continuing to seek her company, when he was still so far from a position in which he felt that he could ask her to marry him; but if only himself was to be considered, he was quite willing to bear whatever extra pain it might cost him, in extra love, for the sake of being with her now. Mary was very good friends with him, though she always laughed it off if he attempted to pay her any compliment, and never made the opportunities that he knew she might have done had she liked, for their being alone together without the 'three imps.' So Malcolm called the brothers who were always, to use his expression, 'around' when he would have liked a quiet chat with Mary.

On Whit Monday Malcolm insisted on the whole family being his guests, and going off for an all-day

expedition to a village, in the neighbourhood of which was a wood, where tradition said wild lilies of the valley were to be found. He hired what he called a 'team,' in the shape of a waggonette drawn by a good strong horse, and into this packed the whole party from the farm. Unfortunately, there would not have been room for Milly, so she could not be invited, though, as Malcolm said, he 'felt badly' at being obliged to leave her out. The only other drawback was that Mary had to sit on the box with him, to prevent the party behind being overcrowded. In spite of these two regrettable circumstances, Mary spent a very happy day indeed, as did all the guests, and, not least of the company, their host. They dined at a little old-fashioned inn, after which Mr. Turnbull went to see a friend, and Mrs. Turnbull had a rest, and Malcolm, Mary, and the imps went off in search of the lilies of the valley.

They never found the wood, and came in for a great deal of 'chaffing' from Turnbull, when they returned to the inn for tea with no rarer flowers than honeysuckle and dog-roses; but they had at least been persevering in their search for it, since they had been wandering for more than two hours, and little Bobby was so tired out that Malcolm had had to carry him for the last half-hour on his back.

All the boys had enjoyed it intensely, however, and Mary looked the better for her holiday, as her mother said. The new trouble had compelled them to part with their good servant, and Mary had been obliged to work hard lately, with no better help than that of a country girl.

Milly's temper was not of the sweetest when she met Malcolm on his return that evening, though her anger was rather against Mary than against him.

'If he had never met her, we might have been engaged by now,' the foolish girl said to herself; 'but I'll be even with Mary yet!'

The arrival of Colonel Bridger and his family at Exbridge had been indefinitely postponed, through the breaking out of scarlet fever in his family. The colonel was a rich man, to whom a few pounds were no consideration, and Milly's salary had begun from the date from which she had been engaged; but till the family arrived she would have to pay her full board at Miss Sheridan's. Half a year's salary was already owing for debts, a present she had received from her brother a month ago having done no more than temporarily stop her creditors' mouths, and she was in direful straits for money. Under these circumstances Milly wrote and asked Miss Ladbroke whether she might visit her. A favourable answer came, and Milly went immediately.

'Have you heard the news from the farm?' was Miss Ladbroke's first question, as the aunt and niece met. 'Old James Love is dead at last, though not till he's run up a doctor's bill a yard long for his brother-in-law to pay. As for his wife, she's so worn out with nursing him that they say she'll be no good for some time to come; and the eldest girl is barely fourteen, so she can't be expected to earn much of a living. It's a pretty look-out for the Turnbulls.'

'What! are they going to have the Love family at the farm?'

'I don't know; there's nothing settled yet, I should think; they only got the news last night. All I know is, there's nobody else that will be able to do anything for them. Love hadn't a relative in the world, and all the Turnbulls except John are as poor as church mice. It's a bad look-out.'

'It is indeed.' And the worst of it was that Miss Ladbroke, who, though generally extremely close, occasionally did a very liberal thing in a spasmodic way, might contemplate herself coming to the rescue, whereas Milly had designed that whatever generosity was going should be expended on her.

'It's dreadful to be poor, and not have anyone to fall back upon!' she remarked, with a sigh. And then, taking the bull by the horns, she cried in a pleading voice—

'Oh, Aunt Susie! I am going to ask you straight out if you will kindly lend me five pounds.'

'Five pounds!' exclaimed Miss Ladbroke. 'Why don't you ask for fifty straight off?'

'It may sound a lot, but it isn't really; not when you are getting a salary of thirty-five pounds a year. It was all that time I was waiting, looking about for a situation, that has put me back; but I'll repay it, every penny of it. I think you might trust me for that, Aunt Susie.'

'The more you get from me now, the less you will have from me later,' Miss Ladbroke remarked, after a minute's thought. 'I won't lend you five pounds, for I never lend money at all, but I'll give you two, and you must just do the best you can with that.'

Milly was profuse in her expressions of gratitude, concealing what she felt of disappointment that the sum to come immediately into her hands was not the larger one. With her loose notions of honour and honesty, money lent was the same as money given, without the feeling of obligation, which was distasteful to her. By what twisted process of reasoning Milly considered herself less humiliated by the reception of money gained through the false pretence that it was going to be returned, than through straightforward

begging, is hard to say; but she was only one of many whose moral sense is perverted in this way.

Miss Ladbroke gave the two sovereigns, not too willingly, with the remark that before Milly came begging again she had better see what she could get for that smart tie and the feathers in her hat. Altogether it was not a very pleasant afternoon. For once Miss Ladbroke was more taken up with the people at the farm than with her favourite niece, and they and their troubles were not an interesting subject to Milly. That was until Miss Ladbroke said—

'They say John wants to have his sister and the children there, but there'll be no room for three more in that house. If they had let Mary go out to make her own living, as I always advised, the Turnbulls would see the wisdom of it now. They'll have to part with her in the end, as likely as not, and she'd better have begun early.'

'You may take my word for it, Mary won't budge,' Milly responded, laughing disagreeably. 'She's got the whip hand over them all there, and whoever has to go to the wall, it won't be she.'

The Whit Monday outing had been such a success that Malcolm insisted that there should be a repetition of it on the next Bank Holiday, the first Monday in August, the party going in a different direction this time, and having a boating picnic, since it was now the season of water-lilies.

Mary wished for this day in Malcolm's company, for she wanted to have a talk alone with him. Although there had been nothing like loving passages between them, they had been gradually developing into real friends, and though Mary seldom thought of asking anyone's advice, she felt that she would be glad

to have his support in the plan which she had in her mind.

The opportunity offered itself in the afternoon when, at Malcolm's suggestion, he and she left the rest of the party on an island to prepare tea while they rowed on a little higher up the river in search of the water-lilies.

Now the chance came for speaking to Malcolm by himself Mary found it, somehow, difficult to begin. She felt a hesitation about telling him of the proposed step which would make the difference between their positions, already in her eyes considerable, wider, and an idea had suddenly come over her that he might not approve of her scheme. They both busied themselves laughingly in seizing the blossoms as the boat tried to glide past them, and snapping their long tough stalks.

'Shall we row up as far as we can go?' asked Malcolm, when they had laid in a supply of lilies. 'It's only a little farther, and the trees make a nice shade where it narrows up to the source.' The thought of shade was agreeable, and anything more delightful than the spot they reached in about ten minutes cannot be imagined. Here the trees met overhead, and reflected themselves in the perfectly still water. Masses of fragrant cherry-pie and meadow-sweet grew down into the stream. Dragon-flies flitted to and fro, and Malcolm drew Mary's attention to a kingfisher that flew past them, and the hole in the bank where it had probably made its nest.

'I do love the country!' said Mary, drawing a long sigh, as Malcolm rested on his oars. It was not the bare matter-of-fact beginning she had intended to make, but she must begin somehow.

'So do I,' he said. 'When I first went to live in a town, I felt as if I should be stifled. One grows used to everything, of course, but when I get right away

into the open like this, it makes me feel sometimes like slipping my harness.'

'I hope I shall keep mine on as well as you do,' Mary responded, strengthened already by his words. 'I am going to leave the country and live in a town too.'

Malcolm's heart stood still, but he put great force upon himself, and spoke perfectly steadily.

'Are you going to be married?'

'Oh no!'

His heart beat again as he joined in her laugh.

'I beg your pardon, but I didn't know of anything else that could take you from home.'

Then Mary explained everything to him, while he listened with such evident sympathy and such good strong common-sense in all his responses that, for the first time, it occurred to her how nice it might be to have someone to lean upon as a tower of support instead of having everybody lean on her. She was hardly prepared therefore for the little start he made, when she ended her explanation of all the reasons there were for her to go out and earn a living, by—

'So, as I don't feel there is anything else I know how to do really well, I am going into service. Miss Fitzjames has heard of a place for me as under-housemaid and to help the parlour-maid. It is the same family as Milly is going to as a governess.'

'Can't you find anything better than that?' he asked quickly.

'No. It's a very good place, I mean for a beginner. Of course, as Miss Fitzjames says, I could not begin straight as head housemaid or parlour-maid. But I ought soon to get up to that, and Mrs. Bridger gives very high wages. I am to begin with fourteen pounds a year.'

'Is that much? . . . for *you*, Miss Mary?'

Malcolm had not intended ever to be sentimental

until the day when his income justified it, but he was taken by surprise then, and there was something in the tone of his voice and the look in his eyes as he spoke which made the roses upon Mary's cheeks a deeper shade.

'Of course it is,' she answered, with her usual laugh, very bright now. 'Why, girls generally begin with eight or nine pounds, or less than that. Mrs. Bridger wants a girl who is old enough to be trusted a little, and strong enough to do hard work.'

Malcolm did not look at all pleased.

'So you are to be under the housemaid and the parlour-maid!' he said. 'They'll put all the dirty work on you, and keep you running about from morning till night.'

They talked till the lengthening of the shadows reminded Mary that the party on the island would be wanting their tea. Then they rowed down the stream through the water-lilies again, the lesson Mary was to have had being forgotten, because they were talking still.

'Of course I would do anything you ask me to, Miss Mary,' were Malcolm's final words, as the boat ran in among the rushes by the side of the island; 'though I do wish it had been something different from this!'

Malcolm considered it incumbent upon him to keep up his liveliness, so that everybody might have a 'good time.'

The difficult task that Mary had laid upon him of reconciling Mrs. Turnbull to her departure was not entered on by Malcolm till the party had got back to Ravenhill Farm, and supper was eaten, and all the boys had gone off to bed. Mary went up with them, to give Malcolm the opportunity of seeing Mrs. Turnbull by herself. Then he plunged into the subject.

'I hear from Miss Mary that's she's thinking of leaving you.'

The tears came straight to the mother's eyes.

'Yes, she's thinking of it; she has set her mind upon it. But I was hoping maybe you'd persuade her not to. I don't feel as if I could part with her, Mr. Stewart; at least not in that way.'

Malcolm could not bear to see Mrs. Turnbull cry, and he felt quite brutal, as well as almost insincere, in the persuasions he now used to reconcile her to the idea of Mary going into service; but he had promised.

'You can hardly hope always to keep her, can you?' he said, after putting before her everything that Mary had suggested to him to do.

'I've always looked forward to seeing her some day with a home of her own,' agreed Mrs. Turnbull between her sobs. 'But that's a different thing. I never thought of my Mary having to go out as a servant. It isn't any feeling of sinful pride, I hope, but . . .' Here the poor woman broke down again. Malcolm had got to the end of everything he had to say, much as it had gone against the grain to do it, and now he sat, miserably uncomfortable, and aware that Mary's eyes would meet his with reproach in them, when she saw how unsuccessful he had been. She would hardly give him credit for the conscientious way in which he had followed out all her instructions.

'Of course I know that what you say is true,' Mrs. Turnbull proceeded at length—'that a girl doesn't demean herself by going into any honest employment; still, there are people that think differently, and I can't help fearing that Mary won't have the same chance in life, I mean of settling down the way I should wish her to, if she goes out into service.'

'If you mean marrying,' Malcolm said, turning

suddenly emphatic, and the colour mounting to his face, 'there's no man worth his salt who wouldn't respect your daughter ten times more, and love her ten times more, too, if that were possible, for what she's doing.'

Mrs. Turnbull's tears stopped suddenly. She took her handkerchief from her eyes and looked Malcolm straight in the face.

He felt himself getting redder still, and losing something of his self-possession. This last, however, was only for a moment. Then he steadied himself, and spoke out in a manly, straightforward way.

'I only wish,' he said, 'it were in my power to ask your daughter to leave home in another way. I love her as dearly as I think that any man can ever love her, though I try not to let myself think about her in that way. I don't feel that I'm in a position to marry yet, and I wouldn't ask her to be engaged until I saw my way clear for that. I don't think it is fair to tie a girl, even if she is willing to be tied.' Then he explained frankly what made his circumstances at the present unhopeful. His father had lately been taken ill with an illness which bade fair to be a long and costly one, and all his spare money was wanted at home, and would be probably for years to come. He would not ask Mary to share a life of poverty, nor marry, till he could support a wife and family at least in honour and comfort.

Mrs. Turnbull might have overlooked the drawbacks of a marriage with Malcolm under his present circumstances, but his own views in this matter were based on an abiding principle, namely, that what was the right thing and the wise thing to do was the point to be considered, not that which would prove pleasantest at the moment.

'But there's one thing I may say,' Malcolm ended decidedly, 'if I ever find myself in a position, as

I hope I may do some day, to try and win Miss Mary, it wouldn't make any difference to me if she'd been sweeping the streets or going around the country with a barrel organ. It will be the proudest day in my life when I can ask her to marry me.'

The step of the angel was at this moment heard on the stairs, and Malcolm had only time to exact a promise from Mrs. Turnbull that she would not mention what had passed between them to her daughter, when Mary entered. One glance at her mother's face caused her to turn a grateful look on Malcolm.

'Well, mother, has Mr Stewart made you see that there's nothing so very dreadful in my going to live at Colonel Bridger's?' she asked, coming over to her side. Mrs. Turnbull held out her arms.

'Mr. Stewart seems to see it as you do, Mary,' said the mother, after a tearful embrace, but with a smile in her eyes. 'I don't want to go against both your judgments, so I'll say no more about it; but you must make them promise they'll let you come home and see us as often as you can.'

'Thank you so much, Mr. Stewart!' Mary said as she wished Malcolm good-night at the door when he left. 'It was good of you to win mother over to my side. I didn't really think you would have brought her round so completely; she seems quite happy about it now!'

The cordial handshake and the innocent gratitude in her face made Malcolm very red again, but he was standing in the shadow.

'It *was* nice of him,' Mary said to herself, as she went upstairs. 'I couldn't have thrown myself into a thing that had gone against my own judgment at first like that. I do think men have larger natures than women.'

CHAPTER VII

AT COLONEL BRIDGER'S

IT was with a strange mixture of feelings that Milly learned that Mary was coming to be a servant in the same house where she was to be governess. She felt it would be a humiliation to own a relative who occupied so humble a position, and the idea of having to acknowledge that she was cousin to the under-housemaid made her very angry.

'I believe Mary has done it just to spite me!' she said to herself; so morbid and distorted had her view become, thanks to the jealousy which she had made no effort to cast from her. But, on thinking over the position, the spiteful girl found much that was agreeable. It would be quite delightful to be able to look down from a superior height on Mary; to be called 'Miss Ladbroke,' and treated as a lady, while Mary, who thought such a lot of herself, would wear a cap and apron, and be addressed by her Christian name. It might even occur that she would have some opportunity of ordering Mary about, a most delicious idea! The servants of a house had to obey the governess, she knew. To small and uncultured minds there is a great deal in a name, and Milly looked upon herself as quite the equal of the gifted and highly educated ladies who stand in the top rank of the

governess's calling, and Mary as little better than the commonest maid-of-all-work.

'I am sorry now that I recommended that cousin of Mary's to the Bridgers,' Christabel Fitzjames was saying, just as Milly was indulging in the reverie above described.

'I thought you were rather precipitate, dear,' Miss Mason responded gently. 'You see we knew so little about her.'

'Yes; I am always apt to act upon impulse; but she is Mary's cousin, so one knew she must be all right. And the Bridgers are not so very particular, you know—I mean about manners, or they would have had a lady for their children from the first. It is not her being vulgar I meant, but it won't be very pleasant for Mary having her in the same house, in what is regarded as a better position. How absurd it seems, doesn't it?' she added, with a laugh, 'that girl being considered Mary's superior!'

'I think Mary will be above minding such an artificial distinction,' said Miss Mason. 'She has much sense as well as very high principles, and one can hardly suppose that the cousin will be so ridiculous as to give herself airs, as if there were any real difference between them, except what is to Mary's credit. Still, I agree with you it is unfortunate their happening to be in the same house; and Mary is such an exceptional girl, so superior in every way, that I should have liked her to be with still nicer people. The colonel is a regular "lion in the house," you know; and I don't know how much I should care to serve under Mrs. Bridger, though of course it is a good situation as far as wages go, and so on.'

'It is always difficult to find a girl a first place,'

responded Christabel; 'and people who do not know Mary cannot tell what a treasure she will be; but they will soon find out, and then she is sure to get on. Vincent says that he has hardly ever met with so conscientious and high-minded a girl as she is.'

Then Christabel ordered her carriage, and drove to Ravenhill Farm to ask Mary what she would like to have as a parting present. She had thought of a writing-case or a work-box, but her idea of Mary's good sense was strengthened when Mary chose instead the material for her print gowns.

'I can make them myself, miss,' said Mary; 'but I should be pleased if father hadn't any expense about my outfit.'

After this Christabel drove into Exbridge, and selected a number of the prettiest prints and the most becoming caps she could find, which she purchased, in addition to a long length of fine apron linen, and took back to the farm. Mary had a good black dress already, and plenty of underclothes, for, plain as was her outer costume, she was as particular as Christabel herself about her underlinen, and was able to have it very nice and dainty, her fingers being so clever with the needle and the evenings for sewing so long.

From the time they were children together Milly had wondered at Mary's taste in this direction. 'What did it matter what things looked like that nobody could see?' she asked, marvelling at her cousin's industry in making so many frills to her nightdresses, and the energy that was spent on getting up white petticoats which might have been expended on dressy blouses or flounced skirts.

For once Aunt Susan expressed approval of Mary's line of conduct.

'You've more sense than I gave you credit for,' she said. 'But the thing is to see how long you will stick to it. You won't find service a bed of roses, I can tell you; you who've never been accustomed to being snubbed, and having to do what you're told, however much you may think your own way would be best.'

Her voice, however, was more kindly than her words, and she ended—

'If you keep that place for a twelvemonth, as I said, I will give you three pounds.'

'Thank you, Aunt Susan,' laughed Mary. 'You see if I don't come for it. Three pounds added to fourteen, that will make seventeen! I know you think that I shall run home the first time I am scolded, but I'm not going to, I can assure you!'

The Bridgers had taken possession of their new house, and Mary was to go to her situation the next day. The Loves had arrived a week before, but Aunt Susan, with unusual hospitality, had invited the two girls to sleep at her house for that time, and Mary had been glad to have the opportunity of showing their mother all the ways of the farm, and starting her upon the duties Mrs. Love was to undertake in return for the home her brother was giving to her and her daughters. It had been trying work for Mary making over all the offices in which she took so much pride to a stranger, though Mrs. Love was a nice woman, and bade fair to prove a capable successor to herself.

And now the last evening was come, there was a choking feeling about Mary's throat which she felt weak and foolish, and she had to go over very often to herself the arguments she had given Malcolm to use to her mother, showing what a good thing

in every way was the step she was taking. She knew that this first step, though a short one, was a real leaving of her girlhood's home behind her; she was going out into the world now, and the dear old happy days at Ravenhill were gone, never to return. Mary looked down through her window over the yew hedge to the country which lay beyond, the reaped harvest-fields with the pathway along which she had walked so many times to church, the copse where she and the boys found the first catkins in spring and the last blackberries in autumn; and above the treetops, whose green was growing tinged with brown and gold, to the sky, in which a large red sun was going down surrounded by torn fragments of flame-coloured clouds.

Mary was not given to crying, but her eyes grew suddenly dim, and she had to squeeze the lids together hard several times to clear them, so that she could see who it was had just clicked the latch of the garden gate. It was Malcolm, and the sight of his face cheered Mary wonderfully. She remembered how he too had left his home to go to live in a town, doing work which he had at first hated, and had never since learnt to love. The thought of his courage, and the buoyancy of spirit which had not forsaken him in his uncongenial life, made the smile she gave back to him as he glanced up and caught sight of her as brave and joyful as though this had not been her last day at home. Indeed, his presence made the evening cheerful for them all, for, though he could not bear the idea of having his Mary go into service, he had come over with the opposite idea to adding to their dejection.

'What are you going to do with yourself in the evenings?' he asked Mary, at one point in the conversation.

'I shan't have much time for doing anything with myself in the evenings, or any other time, I should think,' Mary responded gaily. 'The question is, what they are going to do with me! That's what it is when you go out into service. I believe I am to keep the house and table-linen mended; so when the glass and plate are washed up, and the bedrooms are all got ready for the night, there's sure to be plenty of needlework to do.'

'But I mean on your evenings out. Don't you have any evenings out?' Malcolm looked rather blank. 'All the girls at home do; and I thought perhaps you'd be spending yours sometimes with your cousin.'

There was a general laugh at Malcolm's ideas of service, founded on the very different state of things prevailing in Canada, where, in exchange for double the amount of work that is expected from a servant, there is allowed much greater liberty.

'I am going to have two afternoons off in the month though,' said Mary. 'Not Sunday, because there is such a lot of company then. I'm to leave as soon as I can get ready, after luncheon is cleared, and be back just in time to help wait at dinner.'

'Is that what Mrs. Bridger told you this afternoon?'

'Yes; and she explained to me about my work. I shall simply have to do what I am told. I am to take all my orders from the housemaid and parlour-maid. They have both been with her for a great many years, and know just how she likes things done. It's a large family, three grown-up young ladies and two sons that belonged to Colonel Bridger's first marriage, and a lot of little children of the second family. And I'm to wait on the schoolroom,' Mary

added, with twinkling eyes, but somehow a little deepening of the red on her cheeks. 'Won't it be funny to have to wait on Milly!'

There was an indignant exclamation from the boys, in which Malcolm felt inclined to join.

'Did you see anything of Milly to-day?' asked her mother.

'Yes, she was going in at the front door as I came out at the back.'

Mary remembered the expression on Milly's face as, with her hand on the knocker, she nodded to her, and she laughed again. Turnbull murmured something in disparagement of his wife's niece and appreciation of Mary.

'And how did you like Mrs. Bridger? You haven't told me,' her mother said.

'She is very stiff and quiet, very delicate and very particular, Mrs. Beddoes told me. Mrs. Beddoes is the cook, and a sort of housekeeper. I am to take my orders from her too. It won't make so much difference to me what Mrs. Bridger is like, as what she and my other two mistresses are! I saw the parlour-maid, Johnson they call her; I think she must be nearly fifty, and she looked rather cross, but I don't wonder, for when she brought me into the room Mrs. Bridger stopped her, to show her there was something a little wrong with the way the curtains were looped up. Of course she wouldn't like to be found fault with before me.'

'Well, I hope you'll be happy,' said Malcolm, in a tone less cheerful than he had used before. 'If you aren't, you are not bound to stay, that's one thing.'

'But I'm going to stay,' answered Mary, putting her lips together in the way the boys used to call

'Polly putting her determined cap on,' 'if they put all the work of the house on me, and feed me on bread and water! I'm going to win Aunt Susan's three pounds. She has promised to give me three pounds if I stay out my year!'

The following day, that on which Mary was to leave home, was that of Mr. Vincent's weekly Bible-class for young women, and she made an exertion to get through the packing and everything else that had to be done, so that she could go to it for the last time. It was such a busy day that it needed much activity and some contriving to accomplish this; but Mary was glad she had taken the pains required, for the lesson seemed, as in fact in some measure it was, intended especially for her.

The greater part of Mr. Vincent's teaching was taken directly from the life of our Lord, and to-day he spoke of the ending of Christ's quiet home-life at Nazareth, which had formed the subject of the last week's lesson, and His going out into the world, and showed how the long training of those uneventful years of daily labour, poor living, and especially of obedience, had prepared Him for the time of His public work, with its new demands upon His patience, courage, and self-denial. How tiring and exhausting that life must have been, with the continual preaching and teaching, which was the occupation that took most out of a person; the perpetual crowd pressing round Him, composed to a large extent of people afflicted with terrible diseases, the unceasing contact with ignorance and actual hostility! His own especial friends were men of untrained intellect and vacillating character, quite incapable of entering into His feelings and thoughts, even to the extent in which some men — such as St. Paul, for instance—would have done. For ever,

as He spoke, He had the consciousness that there were those listening who were eager to catch up any word of His which could be made to tell against Him and get Him into trouble. What a strain that must have been! And He had not the relief of a home to retire to, where He might have the complete rest and the privacy which would seem a positive necessity in such a life. When He required solitude, He had to take it from His night's sleep, getting up a long time before daylight, and stealing out into the country to pray. Sometimes the whole night between two of His hard-worked days was spent in prayer. No wonder that there were times when He was worn out with fatigue; no wonder that He was sometimes overcome by the sense of failure.

Then came the practical part of the lesson. Mr. Vincent was always very practical. The thirty years at Nazareth were like a girl's home-life, in which she learned the elementary lessons that would be carried farther later on; obedience, industry, and so forth. But the day arrived when the home-life came to an end; she married, or she went into some business, or out to service. Then came a new set of temptations and difficulties; her work was probably harder, at any rate involved more responsibility, and consequently worries; the people with whom she was thrown in contact were very likely unsympathetic. That was the time when it was proved of what stuff the girl was made; how far she had strength and courage to act upon her old principles, to meet her new conditions. That was the time when she had to rely, as perhaps never before, on the sympathy of Christ. Compared with His life, her own would be a simple and easy one; all her difficulties and trials were of a kind that He had known

in larger measure, and had conquered. Thinking of His life, her little crosses would sink into their proper place, while yet she would feel that He who stood beside her knew by His own experience on earth just what it meant to be tired out before the end of the day's work, to be laughed at or misunderstood for taking a higher ideal of life than those about her; to meet with the spitefulness of the envious, the disappointing half-heartedness of professed friends.

'Be strong and of a good courage,' was the motto of the Christian's life. And, as he spoke, all the strength and courage there was in Mary's nature rose up responsive in the wish to follow in her Master's steps.

'So this is the last time we shall see you at the class,' said Mr. Vincent, as Mary lingered to say goodbye when the others went out. 'And very sorry I am to lose you,' he added. 'But I think you are doing the right thing, and I congratulate you on having made up your mind to it. Will you take this as a parting present from me?'

He put into her hands a beautiful Bible, with Teachers' Notes, and a Concordance at the end. On the first page of it he had written two verses:—

'Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,'

and

'He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant.'

'We are all servants to each other, you know, Mary,' he said. 'If you come to think of it, everybody who works at all—and there is no one in the world who has the right not to work—is doing service

of some kind for others. The only thing to make people ashamed of themselves is to be serving nobody.'

His bright smile, and his warm handshake as he wished her good-bye, and those parting words of his, often came into Mary's recollection, and put fresh heart into her when the Avonbridge life was left behind. Indeed, they helped her through the home partings. That with her mother was not quite so sad, happily, as Mary had originally anticipated. Since Malcolm's putting the case before her, as Mary had gratefully told him, Mrs. Turnbull had ceased to look upon her step with such repugnance and melancholy. She had shed wonderfully few tears on the subject, for her, and had often remarked that no one whose opinion was worth caring for would think the worse of Mary for what she was doing. In spite of the fact of Mrs. Turnbull being such a very easy person to influence, Mary had wondered to find Malcolm's influence had gone so far in removing all her prejudices!

Turnbull drove his daughter over to Exbridge in the gig, and they arrived about six o'clock. Rochester House was a large mansion in the centre of the town, facing the street, though at the back there was a large garden and pleasure-ground, of which Mary had a glimpse as she entered by the back door. She was let in by the kitchenmaid, a rather stolid, but good-humoured looking girl of eighteen, who told Mary they were to share a bedroom, and took Mary up to it at once. The parlour-maid, who met them on the stairs, bade Mary get through her unpacking as quickly as she could, and come down to help in laying the dinner-table. The servants' rooms were all at the top of the house; the one

into which Kitty ushered Mary looked out on the street, but being so high up there was a view above the tops of the houses of the distant country. There was even a glimpse of Avonbridge Hall through the trees, which gave Mary a pleasant feeling of being near home. She thought she would like to see that bit of distance when she said her morning prayers.

The room was comfortably furnished, with a carpet on the floor, and a separate bed, chest of drawers and washstand, and three hooks against the wall for each girl.

'I've took this side. Will you have that?' said Kitty. 'I don't mind changing if you'd rather be here.' She was in some way impressed by Mary, and ready to give in to her and yield her the first place. Mary assured her that she should not think of turning her out, even if she had not preferred the side nearer the window, and their first interview ended in smiles. Perhaps after all she would not have to endure much hardness. Mary hastened with her unpacking, and was soon downstairs in her cap and apron ready to begin work.

'You've not been long,' said Johnson approvingly. 'Have you ever laid a table for dinner before?'

Mary had never done so for a dinner like this, and required to be shown how the knives and forks and spoons went, and the placing of the numerous wine-glasses, but she had often enough laid a cloth, and her quick eyes at once observed that this one had not been folded with sufficient care last time it was taken off. She noticed, moreover, that one of the lamps burned unevenly. On the former subject she kept silence, only resolving to keep the cloth smoother herself, but she asked if she should get the scissors and cut the lamp-wick straight. At this

Johnson, who till now had seemed pleased with Mary's deft movements and rapid footsteps, changed her expression.

'It'll do well enough,' she said, 'if you don't turn it up too high. Just you mind what I was telling you about those flowers!'

By the time the table was laid, there was more work ready for Mary. Kate, the head housemaid, wanted her. She was to help in taking up the hot water to the bedrooms. It was an old-fashioned house, and all the hot water had to be carried upstairs. Mary spilt a few drops of the contents of a can on one of the washstands, and received a scolding, just as if she had been a little child.

'Now wipe that up, Mary. You must be more careful. Look at a thing when you are putting it down.'

The towels were to be folded over the hot water can exactly so. The cold water jug was to be placed exactly there. That was the way Mrs. Bridger liked to have things done. Mary mustn't forget,—again as if she were a little child.

After Mary had received her directions to repeat what she was doing now in the room of every member of the family and every guest four times in the day, and, further, received instructions regarding baths, she was sent downstairs again, as Johnson had something now for her to do. Through the dinner Mary helped in the waiting, always occupying a background position, however, and carrying out Johnson's directions. It was odd to Mary to be brought thus into the midst of the intimate life of a family of gentlefolk. They talked quite unrestrainedly, without regard to nearness of listening ears, while Johnson's face wore so grave and un-

perturbed an expression, even through the jokes, at which Mary could hardly keep herself from laughing, that it seemed as if she really did not hear. Every now and then some of the party glanced at Mary, after doing which one of the sons made a remark in French, and was answered in the same language by his sister, which somehow made her hot and angry. However, there was plenty to occupy her thoughts besides little slaps to her pride. She must see how everything was done, and remember for another time. When the waiting was over, there was the washing of the plate and glass. Again Mary noticed that Johnson's methods were not so particular as her own. She was, in fact, a lazy woman, who went through life on the fatal principle of doing everything she had to do with as little trouble as possible.

On several occasions Colonel Bridger had declared in his anger that Johnson must go, if she did not learn to clean the plate better, and would not take the trouble to move the books off the table when she dusted. That was when, in the words of his sons and daughters, 'Father was in one of his reforming moods,' going round the house hunting up nuisances, and declaring, in a towering rage, that he didn't keep eight servants and pay them high wages to have the house kept like a pig-sty, and the meals cooked in a way that wouldn't go down in a work-house.

These fits of wrath, however, would pass away, and the colonel, a little ashamed of his violence and exaggerated terms, 'made it up' to the servants by sending them off for a treat, or giving them presents all round, and his wife would then persuade him that no change in the household was necessary.

She did so hate having to interview new servants and get them into all her ways! The girls were so careless, too, leaving money and jewellery and things about, that it was most important to have servants whom they knew, and whose honesty could be absolutely relied upon.

As far as the taking of anything belonging to their employers went, the servants at Rochester House were above suspicion, but to Mary there seemed something not quite honest in all the waste that went on in the kitchen regions. The bits of bread, remains of vegetables, and other platefuls of good food that were thrown away distressed her; the way the lights were left burning in unoccupied rooms, the unnecessary amount of fuel that was burnt, the utensils of all kinds spoilt through sheer carelessness, seemed to her a betrayal of the trust reposed in the servants who were considered so absolutely faithful.

'But it ain't nothing to them if we burn a pennyworth more of gas in a night!' 'They can afford to buy a new saucepan, I should hope!' and the like remarks, met any suggestion of Mary for the protection of her master's goods. She was too straightforward not to make such suggestions during her first few weeks at Rochester House, too frank by nature for her face not to show it, when the conversation below-stairs jarred upon or shocked her.

At supper the first evening she was surprised at the openness with which her fellow-servants discussed their employers and their employers' friends, and the intimate acquaintance they displayed with all their affairs, which it seemed hardly possible they could have acquired by straightforward measures. Everything that had passed at the dinner-table was

repeated by Johnson, though not always quite accurately.

When the nursemaid told how she had found a half-written letter on Miss Edith's table, and related with glee its most private contents, the laugh that went round the table and the encouragement given to the girl to remember more, caused Mary's eyes to open so wide that the nurse, who was Jemima's elder sister, said to her, still laughing—

'You are shocking Mary!'

Then they all looked at Mary, and laughed again.

'You didn't ought to have read it,' Mrs. Beddoes now remarked, remembering her responsibility, as having some supervision over the other servants. 'But if young ladies don't want everybody to know what they think of their lovers, they shouldn't leave their letters lying open on their tables.'

Supper over, Mary was in Kate's hands again, for she could not be trusted to carry out the directions she had already received about the baths by herself. Kate went with her from room to room, showing the exact spot on the floor where the blanket was to be spread, and the exact spot on the blanket where the bath was to stand.

'To-morrow you shall do this by yourself,' Kate said. 'But I shall go round afterwards, and see you have done it all by my directions.'

'You needn't do that; I shall remember,' Mary said. She had an accurate memory.

'I shall go on coming round after you until I find you can be trusted,' Kate repeated quietly. 'Young girls always want looking after.'

'I am twenty.'

'Yes; you're twenty, but you've never been out to service before, so you will want showing just as much

as if you were thirteen. I would rather have had a girl of thirteen myself; they're easier to teach, and they aren't so set in their own opinion.'

Mary felt rather injured, for the only opinion she had expressed differing from that of Kate was that Miss Blanche's fire would have more chance of burning if the grate were cleared out at the corners than if its struggling spark were covered with a fresh mass of black coal.

Kate was not a clever woman, though exceptionally thorough and methodical in her work. She had been with the Bridgers ever since she had been in service, and was of opinion that there was one way, and one way only in the world, of doing each minute portion of a housemaid's work. Mary, although not so narrow-minded about details, had not managed a house and trained young servants for so long without having distinct and settled methods of her own, and to abandon them for Kate's old-fashioned plans was more difficult for her and more tiresome than she could have imagined beforehand. Kate, moreover, had an idea that nothing that was done quickly could be done well, not taking in that rapid steps about a room save as much time as a slap-dash way of doing what has to be done in it, and the rate at which Mary got through her work made her for some time suspicious that she was lacking in thoroughness.

Fortunately, Mary had made up her mind that she would have to meet with disagreeables when she went out into service. She had entered on her new life with a very brave spirit, and she determined at once cheerfully to put up with what she foresaw would be a daily trial of her patience.

The evening did not close for the family till between eleven and twelve, and the parlour-maid had to wait

till all of them went to their rooms, to put out the lights and shut up for the night. Often they went out for the evening, and were not at home till near daylight, Johnson said, discontentedly enough. They didn't come down to breakfast till ten o'clock, so it didn't matter for them, but it was hard work not getting to bed till two or three in the morning when one had to be up again at six.

This evening, however, no one was out except one of the young gentlemen, and he took a latch-key, so Mary was in her room by half-past eleven, ready enough for bed, and surprising the kitchen-maid, who woke up on her arrival, by the time she gave to her prayers, instead of getting every minute she could, as Kitty herself did, in bed. Kitty had been well brought up, but it needs much strength of principle to stand against the tide, and she had easily let herself down to the standard of those with whom she was thrown in contact. Before Mary came she had slept with Johnson, who never said her prayers, and had soon got into the way of tumbling into bed at night and out of it in the morning without two minutes on her knees. Kitty felt vaguely uncomfortable as she saw Mary rise from hers and take her Bible to read her usual chapter.

'Aren't you ever going to put out the light?' she said, rather peevishly. Mary shaded it from her face.

'I shan't be long,' she answered. 'To-morrow evening I shall come up just after supper, and take the time I want to myself then. I am sorry I have kept you awake.'

Kitty made no response, but Mary's soft answer, like the warm rain that makes the seed sown in the garden spring up, gave effect to the good example that

recalled to the girl early teaching which had lately come but little to her mind. The Bridgers were not a religious family, and the servants took their cue in this, as in other ways, from the employers. The colonel's violent temper rendered every member of the household more or less irritable, and the indifference of the rest about anything higher than the ordinary aims of life extended through the house. There were no family prayers. The servants might go to church on Sunday, if they could arrange to do so without interfering with the comfort of the family, or they might stay at home, as they pleased. Mrs. Bridger did not feel herself responsible, she said, for the religious observances of those she employed,—that she considered a matter for their own consciences ; all that she had to do with, was the way they served her.

This want of an underlying union, founded on the same high aim, and the sense that each in his vocation was a servant of the One God, even more than the want of mutual personal sympathy between the employers and the employed, that was so marked a feature at Avonbridge Hall, gave a tone to the household, noticed at once by Mary, though it was some time before she traced out its exact cause. Mrs. Bridger would much rather have been served automatically by machinery, had it been possible, and the servants did their work mechanically, with the one idea that so many months of it meant so many pounds of pay. Each held out for her own rights, and, before performing the smallest extra bit of work, considered whether it was her place to do it ; the only exception being that of Kate, who, from her long service, had become to some extent attached to the family, and the recipient of more personal regard.

The day after Mary's arrival Milly made her appear-

ance at Rochester House. She met Mary with her cap and apron on, carrying a coal-scuttle. She herself wore a silk blouse and a jaunty little hat, and carried a parasol.

'Good-morning, Mary,' she said, with an air of condescension. 'I should like to speak a few words with you.'

'I haven't time for many.'

'Nor I, either. Master Donald and Miss Rose are to begin their lessons at nine. What I want to say is this: it's very awkward for me, as you will understand, having you here as a "between," when I am coming myself in such a different position, and I'd rather people didn't know we were related. I'm sure you won't want to stand in my way, Mary, and I should take it as a favour if you would speak to me as "Miss" before the children or any of your fellow-servants. I think it's the least you can do, considering you got yourself in here after it was all settled for me to come.'

'Call you "Miss"! I couldn't, Milly. It would make me burst out laughing! But I'm sure, if you don't want to be known as my cousin, I don't want to be known as yours. I hadn't any idea of boasting about being related to you!'

Mary felt she had not given a conciliatory answer, as she walked on with her coal-scuttle, and a reply less equivalent to a box on the ears would have been really more dignified as well as more saintly; but she did not guess the bitterness that her words roused in the mind of Milly, who, with all the sensitiveness in her own feelings that so often goes with obtuseness about the feelings of others, took them as a deliberate insult.

'I'll bring down her pride!' she said to herself

vindictively. 'Thinking herself so much better than me, indeed, that she's ashamed even for people to know that we're related!'

Had Mary found out about her debts, Milly wondered, or about the real reason for her leaving Girton House? reading into Mary's hasty words a depth of meaning they had not possessed.

'If she does know anything about me, she is sure to tell it,' Milly went on in her mind; and more ardently than ever did she wish that this enemy, as she chose to consider her cousin, had not come to live under the same roof with her.

After a morning spent in endeavouring to teach her rather unruly charges their ABC, and the formation of pot-hooks and hangers, Milly took them out for a walk, and returned to find the children's dinner and hers laid in the schoolroom, a disappointment to her, as she had understood governesses always lunched with the family. However, she had one keen satisfaction, and this was that it was Mary who waited on them. To sit still at the head of the table and have Mary bring in the tray and change the dishes, elevated her in her own consideration to a delightful extent, and though Mary's eyes had a twinkle in them over the process, Milly comforted herself with the thought how great must really be her sense of humiliation.

Although Mary was above any such foolish feeling with regard to her duties in the schoolroom, there were other occasions, begun already on the evening of her arrival, and occurring pretty frequently, when she found her powers of meekness strained to the uttermost, and sometimes giving way beneath the strain. These were the passages between herself and her 'two mistresses,' as she had not inaptly called them.

Mary had been engaged to help the parlour-maid and

housemaid, but how much help was due from her to each had never been defined. She was continually hurrying from one to the other in response to summonses, or in obedience to orders alternatively from Johnson and Kate. It would have taken a singularly easy-going girl, or the ripest of ripe saints, to keep her temper through a day of 'between' duties at Rochester House; and though the other servants thought her wonderfully sweet and good-humoured under the circumstances, Mary was often quite dejected when evening came, to remember how many times a hasty word had escaped her tongue; it gave her a new knowledge of herself that was not at all pleasant, to find how greatly aggrieved it made her every time she received an unfair reproach. Did not this show that her life here was just the discipline she wanted, the beginning for her of the process on which Joseph started when he became a slave in Egypt?

Mary determined to try and bear her reproofs, deserved or not, in silence, and not to take it to heart too much when she was unjustly blamed. It was not an easy task; indeed, for the first few weeks in service she did not find her life at all easy. If anyone had told Mary that she was sensitive, she would have laughed; and it would have made her open her eyes very wide, had it been said that her character, albeit so vigorous, had been formed under conditions analogous to that of a hothouse flower.

Yet such was the case. The atmosphere of love and consideration in which she had grown up, though it had developed so much that was beautiful in her disposition, had not fitted her to meet the roughnesses of the outside world. The habit of commanding obedience, though so kindly and so justly, till she was twenty, did not make it easy at twenty to have to obey.

The little rubs and daily need of submission to rough-and-ready rule which characterise a life in service, were more difficult for a grown-up woman to adapt herself to than for a girl of unformed character. Aunt Susan had been quite right about that. The actual work, too, was harder in some ways than Mary had been accustomed to. Malcolm had not been mistaken in his prophecy that she would be sent very often up and down the flights of stairs. Her employment being divided between two landings necessitated that, and the answering of the bells, which always fell to her lot when she was on parlour-maid duty, kept her running up and down in a way that tired her more than the hardest washing-day at home. If only the young ladies would have taken the latch-key when they went in and out so very often, or if Miss Blanche could have remembered to ask for all the things she wanted at once, instead of ringing Mary up three times for what a single journey would have done! The Bridgers were not a considerate family.

'I keep plenty of servants, and I pay them good wages, and I expect to have the work done,' was what the colonel said, forgetting that no amount of pounds, shillings, and pence will prevent legs aching that are kept on the go from six in the morning till bedtime, and heads feeling weary when the hours of sleep are curtailed night after night.

Mary was not so foolish as to magnify molehills into mountains, or allow herself to pity herself over the unpleasant aspects of her life. She was strong enough not to suffer in health from the lack of rest and the confinement to the house, which was one of the things she found most trying after her constant running out into the farmyard and garden at home. She told herself it was too silly to be homesick when home was

only three miles away, and she was going back there every fortnight, for that to be why she felt so much inclined sometimes, when evening came, to sit down on her bed and cry, and she always managed to keep back those foolish, childish tears.

Yet it must be confessed that she counted the days, and almost the hours, to the first afternoon she should have off duty to see them all at Ravenhill. At the last moment she nearly lost her treat. The young ladies made the sudden announcement that they were going to have some friends to tea.

'You'd better put off your holiday till next week,' said Johnson, who never liked to have extra trouble. 'It will be all the same, you know, if you get out on Monday or Tuesday as to-day.'

But Mrs. Beddoes, who liked Mary, came to the rescue.

'The girl has been promised her afternoon to-day,' she said, 'and I'm sure she's worked hard enough for it. Go along, Mary, and put on your things, and if you're back at a quarter to eight that will do.'

Johnson looked very cross, but when Mrs. Beddoes chose to be decided her word was law; and ten minutes later Mary, with a glorious sensation of freedom such as she had never known before, when her liberty was an unthought-of part of her daily life, was taking rapid steps away from Rochester House in the direction of Ravenhill.

How delightful it was to get off the flagged pavement of the town, and to see hedges on each side of her, instead of rows of houses! And how beautiful the robin's song sounded, as she stopped for a minute in her quick progress to listen, after the cries of the hawkers and the muffin men and the milk boys in Exbridge! And here, at the end of the lane which

led out of the high road on the homeward way, were the three boys, who set up a shout of joy as they caught sight of Mary's figure in the distance. They scampered off at a wild race towards her, Jock reaching her first, in spite of Jem's longer legs, and getting the first hug. The clasp of his strong young arms round her made Mary once more feel inclined to cry. It was as if she had been away fifteen months instead of fifteen days.

They made their way down the lane, along the well-known pathway across the fields, Bobby clinging closely to Mary's hand, and protesting solemnly that he should never let her go again, while Jem and Jock pranced about her like two young dogs, each wanting to be next her on the other side. So they came home; and there was father at the gate, and mother with him; Mrs. Turnbull having picked up more energy since the departure of the daughter on whom she had so much leaned, as Miss Ladbroke had always prophesied she would.

There was another joyful meeting here, and an eager going round the garden, to see if the autumn violets were out, and inspect the operations which the boys had carried on from directions given by Mary. The advantage about coming home on a week-day instead of a Sunday was that she could still be able to do a little work in the garden, and keep things going there, she said; though the dairy and the poultry yard and all her other spheres of labour had had to be given up completely on her leaving home. They were talking about bulbs, and coverings for the sweet-scented aloysia, which, with care, kept alive all through the winter in Mary's warm south border, when another step came on the path, and there was Malcolm!

'It was real lovely of them to give you your

holiday on Saturday,' he said; 'when I'm off duty too!'

And Mary felt very glad her afternoon had not been postponed till Monday or Tuesday. The happiness of that evening at home made up for all the home-sickness which Mary had had such hard work in beating down through these two long weeks. Everybody was in the highest of spirits, with heaps of news to tell and any number of questions to ask. Mary could not help contrasting these smiling faces and cheery tones with the constantly overcast expressions and irritated voices which went all through Rochester House. What a wonderful difference the sunshine made! There is nothing like home sunshine for being so very precious, and yet so very cheap!

'I should like to bring Kitty out here one day,' said Mary. 'She would enjoy it. Her parents live ever so far away in the north of England, and she only gets home once a year. She's such a nice child, and does any little thing she can for me.'

'A child?'

'Well, I believe she's eighteen, but I feel as if I was her mother. It's nice to feel like that to anyone at Rochester House,' she added, laughing; 'when they all think they're my grandmothers.'

'Now you must tell us about them all,' said Mrs. Love. 'What's the colonel like? I've heard it said he's got an awful temper.' Mrs. Love was one of the women who always hear what is said about everybody in some mysterious way. Mary felt it incumbent upon her to answer with discretion.

'I have not come in for it, anyhow,' she said. 'Of course I don't have much to do with him, or any of the family. We three under ones, the nursemaid, the kitchen-maid, and I, have just to take our orders from

the upper ones, and do what they bid us. The mistress doesn't trouble about the arrangement of the work, and if she has any orders for me she gives them through Johnson or Kate.'

'And what are the young gentlemen like?'

'Mr. Harold is very quiet. He is a barrister, or is going to be one, I don't know which. Mr. Edward is all full of fun, but he has gone away now.'

'And what are the young ladies like?' Mrs. Love was set on finding out all she could.

'Miss Edith is very pretty. She is out nearly all day playing golf and tennis, and goes to lots of dances; and so does Miss Dora. I don't think they've either of them spoken to me; but Miss Blanche has. She is a kind of invalid; sometimes she is so poorly she has to stay in her room all day, and she always has her breakfast in bed, and beef-tea at eleven, and that sort of thing. And then at other times she'll go to a ball, and dance the whole night.'

'Nerves!' said Mrs. Love decidedly. 'Well, she must be a trial. I've no patience with those sort of ladies.'

'She is very pleasant to me though, and the waiting on her doesn't make much difference. I mean . . .' What Mary really meant was that, as she never was allowed to be still for one moment from morning till night, since the instant she was unemployed either Johnson or Kate was sure to have something for her to do, she might just as well be obeying Miss Blanche's orders as theirs; but what she said was, 'It's all in the day's work.'

As for the servants, Mrs. Love, with all her prying questions, did not succeed in getting out of Mary more than what is called 'sketchy' information about them. She liked the cook best, after little Kitty, who had

become so fond of her that a corresponding feeling had risen in her own heart for the girl; next the nurse, of whom, however, she saw very little. The nursemaid reminded her rather of Milly. And this brought the conversation on to the subject of Milly Ladbroke.

'She gives herself fine airs, I have no doubt,' said Mrs. Love.

'She has some fine new things, but she hasn't anyone to give herself airs before, for, except the children, she sees nobody but me.'

'And you really do wait on her?'

'Oh yes. Sometimes she rings me up pretty often too. "Master Donald wants some water," or, "Miss Rose says she must have a different kind of jam for tea to-day." I think the children must worry her. She looks as if they did; and I heard little Miss Rose taking her off the other day.'

'But you must see more of Milly than Mary does,' said Mrs. Turnbull, addressing Malcolm. 'Is she still as great friends with those two ladies you spoke about?'

'The Miss Simpsons? Oh, they're gone away. I don't think they are much loss for her. They weren't quite what a man calls "good style." But I believe they write to each other. Miss Ladbroke is hoping they will ask her to spend her holidays with them in London.'

'Why, she's never beginning to think about her holidays yet! She's only been a fortnight in her place.'

'I think Miss Ladbroke is one of the young ladies who like holidays a good deal better than work,' Malcolm answered, laughing.

When the time came that Mary had to say good-bye there was laughter up to the end. She started at

a quarter to seven, though she hardly thought the three miles would take her an hour, to make certain of being too early rather than too late. Malcolm asked permission to escort her back to 'slavery,' as he called it, joking; yet, as Mary guessed, with a thought at the bottom of his mind about that sermon on Joseph. The walk back through the sharp twilight air, with the stars coming out silently to look at them before the lights of the town were reached, was the quietest but not the least pleasant part of the evening to them both.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DOWNWARD PATH

MARY had been quite right in thinking that Milly was not happy in her much vaunted situation. Her pupils were a trial to her; she had never before had the sole management in teaching, and the two little Bridgers were not easy to manage. They were clever, spoilt children, with a touch of their father's temper and their mother's indolence. Milly had not the art of making instruction agreeable to unwilling minds, or the tact to control headstrong natures, without the perpetual friction above all things to be avoided in a schoolroom or nursery. Milly had not imagined two children of five and six could give so much trouble, and there were moments when she secretly sighed for the orderly routine of Girton House, where there was always a superior authority to whom to refer. Her constant threats to tell the children's 'mamma' or 'papa' were only met with laughter by the audacious little creatures.

'If you tell father, he'll say it's your fault for not looking after us better,' said the precocious and impertinent Master Donald.

'And mother 'll say, "Go away, I've got a headache,"' chimed in Rose, who always followed her brother's lead.

'And we don't call them "papa" and "mamma";

it's only vulgar children do that,' added Donald, pursuing his advantage, as he saw the vexation of defeat in Milly's face.

'It is only vulgar children who are rude to their governess!' she answered angrily. 'If you say another word like that to me, I shall slap your hands.'

'Then I'll tell father,' replied Donald coolly, 'and he'll send you away. He doesn't allow anyone to slap us except him.'

Such little scenes were of constant occurrence, and did not sweeten the monotonous round, as it must be to any person who has not her heart in it, of schoolroom work.

It was a decided comfort to Milly when the children, growing quite as weary of her as she was of them, begged to be allowed to take their afternoon walk with their nurse and the babies one day instead of with her. This gave her a welcome respite, though she sat down for her hour of solitude on that Saturday afternoon in a far from cheerful frame of mind. The children were trying enough, but they were not the cause of her worst worries. The lack of money went on pressing more heavily, as it always will with people once started on the fatal career of debt. Her salary would not be paid till the end of her first quarter, and in the meantime what was she to do? There were a few little things especially which she wanted to pay: the money for some stamps which she had borrowed from Miss Sheridan; her washing bill, due for the last three weeks, and for which the woman was beginning to clamour disagreeably; a first instalment of the bicycle hirer's bill, who, little as it could have hurt him to wait for his money, was most annoying in the way he pressed her for 'at least a small remittance on account.'

Ten shillings would cover these. Just for the want of ten shillings her life was made a burden to her, and every day brought some fresh humiliation. It was very hard, very hard indeed, Milly thought. She looked down through the open window on the lawn, on which the young ladies were with their friends playing tennis. Their laughter came up to her, mingled with merry talk. Why did they have such happy lives, and she such a wretched one? At this moment Mary passed on her way out for her holiday. It might have occurred to Milly to contrast her lot with her cousin's, and ask why it was that she need not rise before eight, and had every evening to herself, was waited on, and spared every kind of bodily fatigue, and had such light duties by which to earn a living, with liberty to carry them out on almost any plan she chose, while Mary was on the go from morning till night, with seldom more and often less than six hours in bed, everybody's servant in turn, and with all the most disagreeable and heaviest of Kate's and Johnson's work put, as a matter of course, on her.

This latter was the kind of contrast that Milly did not care to make. She dismissed the consideration of Mary with the envious reflection that she had a home to go to, and a bitter thought connected with Malcolm; and went back to discontented reflections on the joyous lives of Miss Blanche and Miss Dora and Miss Edith, as she leant her elbows on the window seat with her chin resting in her hands and watched them at their tennis. What a lovely ring Miss Edith had on her finger! Milly could see the sparkle of the diamonds from here. What a shame that that girl should be rich enough to wear such jewels, while she was forced to live a life of toil and poverty!

Well, what was the good of sitting there thinking? Milly asked herself at last, with a long sigh. She might as well go and take a turn in the street while the children were out. There were some new autumn hats in Denham and Dibble's window, as she had observed that morning, when hastening past without time to stop and look at them. She put on her outside things and left the schoolroom on her way out of the house.

As she was walking down the passage something bright upon the floor caught her eye. She stooped and picked it up. It was a half-sovereign. What a curious coincidence! If only she had found it in the street! But, after all, what difference would that have made? She did not know whom it belonged to, and the owner, whoever she might be, would very likely think she had dropped it out of doors. Milly's fingers closed round the coin, and she carried it downstairs and out of the house, deceiving herself with the idea that she had not yet made up her mind what she was going to do with it.

She was passing Denham and Dibble's window. There were some lovely frills for the neck hanging in the window, just exactly what she wanted to smarten her up and cover her collars when they got dirty. Only elevenpence three-farthings each! Milly went into the shop and bought one. It was blue, with orange spots on it, and when she tried it on the shop-girl said it made her look 'a treat.'

The ten-shilling piece was broken now, and it need hardly be said that what was left of the sum was all gone by the night. If she had never found out whose the money was, she could not in any case have given it back to the owner,—with this flimsy argument Milly consoled her conscience; if ever she did find

out, she would return it when she got her quarter's pay.

In the meantime Mary had reached home in much revived spirits, and fortified with fresh resolutions of courage and patience.

'Who is your young man, Mary?' asked the nursemaid, when the servants met at supper-time. 'The one that walked home with you. I passed you when I ran out to post a letter.'

'Have you got a young man? Well, you are close, Mary!' remarked Johnson. Mary opened her eyes; it was the last thing she had imagined herself.

'There was nothing to tell,' she answered. 'He is a friend of ours, Mr. Stewart, who was spending the evening at the farm, and as he lives in Exbridge he offered to see me home; that was all.'

There was so much spirit in her manner, as well as such perfect frankness, that the torrent of chaffing about to fall upon her was arrested.

'Well, you needn't have fired up so,' said Johnson. 'There's nothing to be ashamed of,' she added disagreeably, 'if he's a respectable young man.'

'Oh yes; he's quite respectable,' answered Mary, with a quiet laugh.

'It isn't Mr. Stewart of the Bank, is it?' asked Mrs. Beddoes.

'Yes.'

Nobody said anything more, but from that time there was a little difference in the servants' manner towards her. She had risen considerably in their estimation, on their discovering that she had the distinction of intimate friendship with a man of such high standing in every way as 'Mr. Stewart of the Bank' without having so much as let them know of it, and

that it was not because she had no spirit that she allowed herself to be put upon so much, and let Johnson and Kate speak to her in the way they did without answering them back. From this time they used to observe her more closely, and it was a regular subject of good-natured laughter to see the colour spring to Mary's cheeks and the flash into her eyes, while her lips were pressed together in the rule of silence she found so hard to keep. When supper was over that evening Mrs. Beddoes spoke to Mary privately.

'Do you think Mr. Stewart will be coming to see you?'

'No,' Mary answered. 'They all know at home what the mistress told me before I came, about her not allowing me to have visits from any young man unless I were engaged to him.'

'That's said to all the servants that come,' replied Mrs. Beddoes. 'But you know those things are pretty much left with me. We don't keep to those rules too strictly, if I know what the young man's like.'

Mary knew that. It was one of the things which had surprised her, to find that half the servants had friends who came to see them, as was evident, against Mrs. Bridger's orders.

'If he likes to drop in sometimes in the evening, I'll see that it don't get you into trouble with Mrs. Bridger,' Mrs. Beddoes said. She was a good-natured woman, with lax ideas in the matter of truth and honour. The girls wanted a bit of fun, and if the young men were respectable she was not going to act the dragon, was what she said, and she was not prepared for Mary's answer, which, though it tried to be respectful, was more than equally decided.

'Mr. Stewart is the last man in the world to wish to do anything that would get me into trouble if it were found out, and I shouldn't think of letting any of my friends come to a house where they were not wanted, and would have to enter on the sly.'

The next day was Sunday, and Mary was to go to the eleven o'clock service, if she could get through her work in time. She had just accomplished this by the exercise of a good deal of diligence, for Kate was too methodical to allow the dusting or any other part of the morning's routine to be omitted for the sake of the day of rest. The bells were beginning to ring as Mary ran upstairs to change her gown. She was just opening the door of her room when she heard a voice from the passage below calling, 'Mary, Mary!'

'Yes, Kate. I have just gone up to get ready for church.'

'Come down first; I want to speak to you.'

Mary descended, biting her lip. Kate might drop that deliberate tone of hers when there was so little time to spare, she thought. But Kate was not to be hurried. She waited till Mary had got the whole way down the steps, and stood in front of her, before she spoke again.

'Did you sweep the passages this morning?'

'Yes.'

'The whole way along?'

'Yes.'

'And the stairs?'

'Yes.'

'The whole way from the top to the bottom?'

'I did, every inch. There isn't a corner I didn't go into.'

'Did you pick up anything?'

'I don't know . . . Yes, a button off somebody's glove, and two or three pins . . . nothing of any consequence.'

'Well, then, you'll sweep out the whole of this passage again, and go into the corners a second time. Miss Edith says she dropped her purse yesterday; it burst open, and she hadn't time to look for all the money. She picked up what she saw, but she finds there is a ten-shilling bit missing, so it must be somewhere about. You'd better turn up the edge of the carpet the whole way along.'

If ever Mary was tempted to make an impatient retort, it was at that moment. She knew that she had done her work thoroughly, and the evident conviction of Kate that she had slurred over it added to the irritation produced by the order just given, which would effectually prevent her getting to church that morning. But some words she had learnt the night before came to her mind. It was Mary's custom, one suggested by Mr. Vincent, to learn a verse of the Bible by heart each evening, and make it a motto for the coming day, recalling it every now and then, and trying especially to act upon it. It was wonderful the help that Mary's texts had been to her in this new and more trying phase of life.

'Why will ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?'

'Only be strong and of a good courage.'

'With good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men,'

and that which spoke of the 'meekness of wisdom' were among those she had chosen, as specially appropriate to her present condition.

Last night's verse had been, 'He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city . . .'

'Better, then, than he who getteth to morning church,' Mary said to herself, with a backward glance also at the verses about meekness and courage. She put on her apron again, and proceeded to repeat her morning's work. Every now and then Kate came to look at her, though never to offer aid.

In the course of her second sweeping Mary came across one more pin, that was all. She brought the dustpan to Kate.

'You'd better go down the stairs again. The young ladies are so forgetful; besides, it might have rolled.'

Mary went once more over the stairs.

There were no results, of course. Miss Edith was told that the missing coin had been thoroughly searched for, and she replied that it was very odd; and here the matter ended. Mary did not give it another thought. It had proved a victory to her, for she had not uttered one cross word. Mrs. Beddoes gave her leave to go to the afternoon Litany, if she came back sharp, without waiting for the sermon. So she did not lose her Sunday service altogether.

Next day, however, another trial of Mary's silence occurred, out of which she did not come so heroically. On Monday morning the colonel came downstairs in one of his 'reforming moods.' Everything, all over the house, was wrong to-day. At breakfast the omelette was sent out to the kitchen with the message that he had not ordered a blanket, and the coffee because he said he wasn't going to poison himself with mud. That unhappy meal over, he went into his daughters' rooms and turned over their cupboards, protesting with triumphant wrath that the girls should have their allowances stopped if they went on buying new frocks while their boots and shoes were all down

at the heels. The first servant he caught, who happened to be Kate, was sent off at once with a huge parcel to the cobbler's, while the French maid was set down there and then, in tears, to sew new braid at the bottom of all the young ladies' dresses. Miss Dora had caught her foot in her braid this morning, and had made excuse that it was worn out. The books on the top shelf of the library were all tumbled down in a heap upon the floor, to display the dust upon their edges, and Johnson sent with a black face to dust every volume there was on the shelves ; the colonel 'did not pay a parlour-maid twenty-five pounds a year to have his house a second Black Hole of Calcutta.' Everybody was in a state of agitated nerves and upset temper. Miss Blanche betook herself to bed at eleven o'clock in tears. Mrs. Bridger prudently stayed in her own room with a headache.

Mary's own turn did not come till late in the afternoon, when the colonel entered one of the rooms to find the lamp smoking. He rang the bell violently, and Mary was sent to answer it.

'What's the meaning of this?' he said, in a voice very much like a roar. 'Here's the wick of this lamp giving out smoke like an Atlantic Liner. It can't have been trimmed for a week. I don't believe you ever do trim it. You just pour in the paraffin, letting it overflow all round, till the wonder is we haven't been blown up long ago,' as he applied his handkerchief to the outside of the lamp, and took it away with an oily mark.

'What do you mean by bringing the lamp in in this state?' he ended fiercely.

Mary's anger rose.

'It isn't I who clean the lamps, sir.'

'Who is it, then?—Are you deaf, girl? I say, who is it?'

Mary saw her error now, but too late.

'Shall I take it out, sir?'

'No, you shan't take it out till I find out who it was put the whole house in danger through her carelessness. Who is it cleans this lamp?'

Mary had nothing to do but answer.

'Johnson, sir.'

'Send Johnson to me!'

That was not a pleasant moment, nor was the face with which Johnson received the colonel's message one that boded well for Mary's future. The colonel's wrath was turned on Johnson for a full ten minutes. She was told that she was not worth the food she ate, let alone the wages that he paid her. Her work was slipshod, all her habits slovenly, there was not a thing she did in the way that it should be done.

'That young girl's worth ten of you,' he said, not dreaming, in his unconsidering wrath, how his taunt would be made to recoil on the head of the young girl in question. 'I began to scold her about the lamp, but if she had done it, it would have been done properly. Mary does her work conscientiously; the place never looked fit to be seen till she took it in hand. I don't need to be told that it's she, not you, who does the rubbing. When you were out the other evening, she waited twice as well as you do; got round the room in half the time, and never made a mistake. She's not dawdling about the house half the day; *she* gets through some work. There, take this thing out; and you'd better give it to Mary to clean for you.'

Mary did clean that lamp, and all the lamps for many days to come; there was not a bit of her own work

that Johnson could put upon her that she did not, and she never forgave Mary for the contrast which had been drawn between them. Johnson was not a pleasant-dispositioned woman. She was vexed when she could not take to herself the credit for everything that Mary did well, while she was only too glad, if occasion offered, to let Mary bear the blame of what she herself had done badly.

But Johnson was the only member of the household who was not soon won by Mary's obliging ways and sunny nature. Even Kate, before long, gave her the compliment that if she was willing to learn, and not too set in her own ways, she would turn out a very creditable servant, and by degrees learned to trust her to do her work conscientiously without looking after her, or even pursuing her with directions at every turn.

With all the rest of the servants, from the little kitchenmaid who was the least, to Mrs. Beddoes, who was the greatest, Mary was very popular. At first they had thought her 'queer,' her higher standard of faith and principle making a certain barrier between them, which the sweetness of her ways ultimately bridged over. They could not understand why she should want to get up earlier than usual, on the one day in the week when everybody else slept later, to go to church on the Sundays she was allowed to go ; but when Johnson took advantage of it to take another hour in bed, leaving Mary that much extra work to do on Sundays, 'because she was so fond of early rising,' the rest were indignant. Indeed, it was only the first morning that she was allowed to bear the brunt of this unkindness in two hours' labour before the seven o'clock service. After that Kitty and Susan, between them, helped Mary through her extra tasks. Mrs. Beddoes, too, made matters lighter for Mary than they

had been at first, by insisting on it that Johnson, who never rose before seven, should sit up to let the young ladies in from their balls, instead of Mary, who had to be up at six, and by this exercise of her seldom enforced authority kept Mary from having her work made really too hard for her.

In the meantime Mary's character was becoming daily stronger, her habits of self-control more fixed. It was a proof of the strength attained in her power of silence, when she was able to accept without a word a long-drawn reproof Mrs. Bridger gave her one day for not having got through some needlework for which she had not been able to seize one moment, owing to the perpetual employment of a far less congenial nature provided for her, at the time she should have had to sit quietly sewing, by Johnson.

This was about four months after Mary's beginning her life in service. She felt how much those four months had done for her in the way of discipline, and she hoped now she had really learnt her lesson of meekness.

The next day, however, something occurred which showed her that pride is a weed which dies hard, and that there was plenty of fuel left in her yet for that process of burning of which Mr. Vincent had spoken.

It was an afternoon in the beginning of April, when word was brought Mary from Kate to come upstairs to Miss Blanche's room, which she had finished setting in order a short time before, that young lady having only gone downstairs in time for tea.

'Did you see any money about the room when you were doing it?' Kate asked, looking at Mary sternly.

'Not to-day.'

'Miss Blanche has just asked me whether I'd seen any; she fancied that she'd left some coin somewhere.'

'She often does, you know; but I haven't noticed any this afternoon.'

Kate was evidently worried. She insisted on every corner being gone into, helping herself to-day, to make quite sure no cranny was unexplored. There was nothing found, and the two seekers straightened themselves up at last. Kate looked at Mary, hesitated for a moment, then spoke.

'Just you turn out your pocket, Mary.'

The blaze on Mary's cheek and the flash in her eyes were such as had never been seen there before.

'Do you think I am a thief?' she cried.

'I never said you were; but it's not those who are most indignant at being suspected that I'd always trust the most.'

It required a hard struggle for Mary to be silent then, but, thanks to the long training she had given herself, she did succeed, and turned her pocket out without a word.

The incident hurt her dreadfully; and from this time she had a feeling that Kate held her in suspicion—the hardest thing she had had to stand as yet.

'Kate ought to have known I could not be guilty of dishonesty,' she said to herself.

CHAPTER IX

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

IN the meantime, what had become of the missing sovereign? From the day that Milly had picked up the half-sovereign and spent it, without any repentance for her act, the stain of dishonesty had become fixed in her nature, and her next act had been but one step on the downward path, not an impossible leap, as it would have been but for the descent begun with the borrowing of money which she never returned, and continued with the pocketing of a coin which did not belong to her. The next step was the 'borrowing' of another half-sovereign from one of the young ladies' purses, which she discovered lying on a garden seat when she was out there one day with the children. Before doing this there was a struggle with her better nature, a need to reiterate to herself, 'I am going to return it.'

But when, in dire straits again, between the payment of her first and second quarter's salary, Milly passed the door of Blanche's room, and saw a sovereign placed conspicuously on the table, there was only a moment's hesitation before she went in, took the money, and put it in her purse! This time she really would return it, once more she said, and

the ten shillings too from the purse, which she had soon learnt must have been Miss Blanche's. To wait for the spending of a pound was nothing to one of them,—it would mean disgrace, probably expulsion from Pernambuco Lodge, to her.

From the time of the episode of the missing sovereign, Kate was never quite the same with Mary; but circumstances soon occurred which swept away all sense of humiliation from Mary's mind. Johnson went home for her holiday, and Mary had to take all the parlour-maid's duties herself for a fortnight. Till now she had been kept, by Johnson's jealousy, as much as possible in the background, doing all the work that did not show, and appearing but little before the family. Now, when she had the whole of the waiting to do, and was known to be solely responsible for the state of the reception rooms and the condition of glass, china, and silver, it became obvious to everybody how thorough and capable Mary was over the work, what a good memory and head she possessed, and how quickly, as well as efficiently, she did all she had to do. Her pleasant face, too, and good-natured ways, were much appreciated, after Johnson's frequently sullen manner and desire at all times to be spared extra trouble.

When the fortnight was over, Johnson returned with the exciting news that she and her friend had made it all up, and he had asked her to name the day. She had named Easter Monday, and in one month's time she looked forward to being Mrs. Podger.

The next day Mary was to have her afternoon at home. Before she set out, she went, according to orders, to the colonel's study to receive her month's wages. These amounted to £1, 3s. 4d., and she

always contrived to take home the pound, and, in spite of occasional imputations from her fellow-servants of meanness, to make the three and fourpence that was left over suffice for her own wants.

'Here are your wages, Mary,' said the colonel, with a smiling face. He could beam as kindly upon a person as he could scowl furiously, and to-day he was in a beaming mood. 'And here is a pound extra, because you've been doing extra work. You have done very well, Mary, very well indeed!'

The gratefulness of her thanks, and the evident unexpectedness of the present, pleased the colonel; and he went on—

'You know that Johnson is leaving us at Easter . . . going to be married. I wish her husband joy of her! If he doesn't look out, she'll blow him up with a lamp before they've finished their honeymoon! Your mistress and I have been talking it over, and we have decided to offer you her place. How would you like that, eh — to be parlour-maid on your own account? You are young, of course, and you haven't been long in service; still, I can see you're a girl with a head on her shoulders. You are not to be like a new broom, you know; you are to go on sweeping as clean as you have done this last fortnight. I am not going to give you twenty-five pounds a year at your age. You shall begin at twenty, that's an advance on fourteen, and you will have somebody to order about yourself instead of being under anybody else. You are pleased, are you?'

Mary's face spoke for her, though this good fortune had taken her breath away, and she found no words to say except, 'Thank you, sir.'

'That's right! Now go home and tell your

mother. And mind I never find any oil upon the lamps!'

All the way home that afternoon Mary felt as if she were treading upon air. Her highest ambition for years to come had never soared beyond a place as house- and parlour-maid combined, in some small establishment, but to be a parlour-maid straight off, and in that big house,—to get twenty pounds a year after only five months in service! She knew girls who had been five years, and only got half as much! To be delivered for ever from the yoke of Johnson and Kate, to have, as the colonel said, somebody under her instead! She would be very kind to that somebody, and remember how her own back had felt sometimes, she thought, overflowing with loving-kindness in her new joy.

But the thing which gave her most pleasure of all about this extraordinary promotion was the confidence in her which it showed on the part of her employers. The parlour-maid's was the most responsible position in the house, in one sense. The silver, the contents of the cellar, everything that was most valuable in her employers' possession, was in her charge. Such a post was seldom reached without many years of apprenticeship and proving of the capacity and faithfulness required for such a trust.

Mary's beaming face, as she came up the garden path, spoke for itself before she had time to cry, 'Such news!' She made them all guess, but stopped the amusement soon, when Jem began with, 'She and Malcolm are going to be married.' Indeed, it was only just in time that his mouth was shut, for there was Malcolm coming in at the gate! He had managed to get a special afternoon off to spend at the farm. The news from Canada was very grave now. It was

found that his father could not possibly recover, and he might be sent for to come home any day. This being the case, he felt he could not lose what might be his last opportunity of seeing Mary for an indefinitely long time. He could not cross the Atlantic without something more decided between them.

'I must do some gardening to-day,' said Mary, after they had all sat and talked for a while. She was full of an eager restlessness unusual with her, and felt she must be doing something—not sitting with her hands in front of her, and Malcolm's eyes upon her like that. Malcolm offered promptly to help, and of course the boys insisted on helping too. It was an exceptionally warm day for March, more like a May day.

'The seeds ought to be in the ground,' said Mary, 'and we haven't got any yet.' But the ground could be prepared, and they set to work to prepare it.

'I shall be able to look after the garden splendidly now,' Mary said, 'for I shall have an afternoon out once a week, instead of once a fortnight; that's what Johnson had. You are not to do anything at all, boys, except dig and weed. I've all sorts of grand schemes about the flowers this year. Now I shall have such a lot of money, I am going to have carnations, and one of those big yellow roses like they have on the wall behind Miss Christabel's broad border. I'm going to allow myself threepence in every pound to spend on the garden.'

As they were all laughing and talking and digging together, Jock suddenly said, 'Hush!' There was a silence, and through it came the note of the first cuckoo.

'Cuckoo! cuckoo!'

'We must all wish,' said Jem. And then there was a silence again, full of laughter.

'What have you wished?' said Jock.

'I've wished Polly would leave service and come and live at home,' said Jem.

'Oh, Jem! just when I'm getting on so well!'

'And I wished her hair would come all the way to the ground,' said Bobby solemnly. 'It's got to her knees now, hasn't it, Polly?'

Mary laughed, and Malcolm gave her brother a mock beating, for he was stealing the hairpins out of her hair, that it might come down, and show Malcolm how long it was. In the course of the tussle it did come down, so that Mary had to run into the house with the long locks that really did reach to her knees waving about her, but she was out again with it neatly coiled up in three minutes.

'You don't care about my wish,' said Jock, in an aggrieved voice. 'It was for you to have heaps and heaps of money, like the people in the fairy tales.'

'Were we all wishing something about Mary?' said Malcolm.

He did not speak as loudly as the boys, but he was looking at her, and she heard him.

'What were you wishing yourself, Polly?'

'I don't know; there is nothing left for me to wish,' she said, for she felt it unmaidenly even to put what would have been her wish into words in her mind. 'Oh yes, I do,' she went on, with a sudden thought, and a laugh, for the dreariest little bits of the past looked so cheerful now with the new light on them, that she wondered how she ever could have found them so trying. 'I wish that Miss Blanche will find out what became of her sovereign!'

Mrs. Love's voice was heard then, calling them all in to tea. It was not till they were on their way back

to Exbridge together that Malcolm was able to say what he had come out that day to say.

They fell into silence as they got outside the gate, after more than usually merry, light-hearted good-byes at home, and so walked for a while.

'Cuckoo! cuckoo!' sang a cuckoo in the copse beside the field.

'Do you know what my real wish was?' Malcolm said. 'It has been my wish ever since the evening I first saw you, only I felt I mustn't say anything until there was a prospect of my being able to ask you to marry me at once. I can't do that now, but I don't feel as if I could leave England without knowing whether you care for me.'

His voice, which Mary had never known otherwise than most firm and decided, shook a little.

'Do you,—Mary?' He stood still and looked in her face. She looked up at him, and he seized both her hands.

'Thank God!' he said.

So that was the end of that wonderful day.

'I may come and see you, mayn't I, now that we are engaged?' Malcolm said, as Mary and he stopped at the door of Rochester House.

'Shall you like to come and see me in the kitchen? Mr. Tyrwhitt, who is with you in the Bank, is a friend of the young ladies. He was here yesterday to tea with them.'

'I know; he offered to bring me to call on Mrs. Bridger. But I haven't much ambition in those ways. I would rather pay my visits on the floor you are on, Mary.' And Malcolm laughed a gay laugh. He was happier to-day than he had ever been in his life—than, as he put it, he had ever deserved to be.

It was in consequence of his wish to come and see

her, that Mary at once confided to Mrs. Beddoes that an actual engagement existed between them.

'I should like Mrs. Bridger to know,' she said. 'And make sure that she does not mind my having visits from him. He may be going back to Canada soon, or I daresay he would have been contented with seeing me at home.'

'And I daresay he wouldn't,' answered Mrs. Beddoes, kissing her. 'I think he is a very lucky man, Mary, though no doubt you're a lucky girl too. And I hope you'll both of you have good luck all through, as I'm sure you deserve!'

The warmth of the congratulations Mary received from the other servants on her coming promotion to be parlour-maid, and on her engagement, which Mrs. Beddoes persuaded her to make known to them all, quite surprised and touched her. Johnson herself waxed affectionate. Only Kate's manner had a chill of reserve in it; but Mary could put up with her groundless suspicions, now that everything was so happy and prosperous with her.

Her reading that night did not furnish her with any verse suitable to her present condition. It was the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, to which she had come in the regular course. The solemn words foreshadowing the great tragedy of the world's history seemed out of tone with her present frame of mind, attuned as it was only to joy. It was always painful to Mary to read the account of our Lord's sufferings, and to-night she felt she could not choose her text from that sad chapter. There was another that recurred to her mind, which was more in accordance with it.

'Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.'

Where did that come from? Mr. Vincent said that

one should always find out the context of every passage in Scripture, or one was apt entirely to mistake its drift. She would look this out to-morrow night ; there was no time for it now, but that would make a nice text to have in her mind through the coming day.

CHAPTER X

THE STORM BREAKS

IT was the day following that which had brought so much joy into Mary's life. Milly, low-spirited and apprehensive, sat in the schoolroom brooding over present and coming troubles, the dreariness of her life, with the perpetual grind of teaching two unruly children, her poverty, and, worst of all, the defection of Malcolm. From his manner the night before, after returning from the farm, and from a few words he had said to her, she had formed a very good idea of what had passed between him and Mary.

The bitterness of her heart welled up in angry murmurings. Everything had gone wrong for her, and well for Mary. She was despised, and Mary honoured—for the news of Mary's coming promotion had already reached her ears ; but that was nothing to her having won the love of Malcolm.

So, miserable and full of rage, Milly felt that she could not sit still. She would go and walk about the streets, the only recreation now within her means. She must return to tea, for, though her two charges had gone off to spend the afternoon with some little friends, and she was not required for them, she could not afford to have extra meals at her boarding-house.

Milly put on her hat and jacket, and went into the passage. There was no one about on that floor. The young people were all in the drawing-room, the servants in the kitchen.

The door of Miss Edith's room was open, and there was her jewel-case open on the table. Trinkets of all kinds had a peculiar fascination for Milly. She went into the room and examined its contents. There were some rings and pins and a pearl and turquoise brooch in the top tray, which lay upon the dressing-table. In the lower part were a necklet and two bracelets, one a plain gold band, the other set with rubies forming the word *Edith*. It was a gift from the young gentleman to whom Miss Edith was just engaged.

As Milly was holding the beautiful thing in her hand, examining the stones, there was a quick step in the passage. So lax were Milly's ideas of honour, that it was not till that moment it occurred to her that what she was doing was anything to be ashamed of. Now she knew well enough, however, and felt she must conceal herself. She ran hastily behind a curtain hanging over some pegs fixed in the wall, which formed a sort of wardrobe for Miss Edith's commoner dresses.

It was only Mary's step which passed the door, and Milly heard her mounting the next flight of stairs to her bedroom. But this sound was followed the next instant by voices, Miss Edith's and Miss Blanche's, approaching every moment. To Milly's no small discomfiture, the two young ladies entered the room, shutting the door behind them, and threw themselves down on the sofa. How long were they going to stay? And what, oh what, if Miss Edith should come to hang up something behind the curtain?

'I haven't been doing any harm,' Milly said to herself, in vain. How could she give an explanation of her position, were she found out?

'Let's look at your ring, Edie,' Blanche said, as the girls proceeded to draw off their gloves. 'I shouldn't wear it about, if the stones are loose.'

'I don't suppose any more of them are, but I shall take it to a jeweller's. It was a good thing Edward picked up that emerald. I believe each one of them is worth about ten pounds.'

'You're so awfully careless, Edie! Look, there is all your jewellery tossed about upon the table.'

'That's all right. There's nobody to steal it. It's not as if there were anyone dishonest about.'

'So one always supposes. But you remember about that ten shillings.'

'Oh, that was ages ago! And a half-sovereign is such a small coin, it can easily be lost.'

'But the odd thing is that I lost another. I didn't say anything about it at the time, because it seemed so nasty to throw suspicions on anyone. But I felt quite sure I had had one there. My purse had been lying about in my room, and when I came to look at the money in it, that piece was gone.'

Edith still gave an incredulous response. She had gone over to the table, and was arranging the jewellery in her dressing-case.

'But that isn't all.' Blanche lowered her voice. 'A fortnight ago, just to see what would happen, I left a sovereign out upon my table. There it was each time I came into my room, for three days, and I thought, "Oh, it's all right; I must have made a mistake." But the third day it had disappeared.'

'Who can have taken it?'

Blanche lowered her voice. 'It must have been

Mary. There was no one else in my room, except Kate, and of course it could not have been she.'

'Why didn't you say something at once?'

'Well, to tell the truth, I felt as if I had been rather mean in laying a trap for the poor girl. You see, they haven't had the advantages that we had, and I don't suppose they look on dishonesty in the same sort of way. I have known even Jenny take sugar-plums.'

'That's bad enough, but money's quite different. Every girl knows what stealing money means. Why, she could be put in prison for it!'

'Of course; and I wasn't sure that father wouldn't have her taken up, if I made a fuss about it. And, of course, that would be the ruin of her. She could never get another place, and no respectable man would marry her. Beddoes told mother to-day that Mary was engaged to a most superior young fellow, and I felt it would be so hard upon them both.'

'But if she has done it . . . !'

'Yes, I know. Still, I feel I put temptation in her way, and I wish I hadn't. Poor girl! she has always been so good to me when I was ill, running up and down stairs again and again, and always appearing with a smile on her face, when Kate would look so cross; and such lots of little things she does for one, that another servant would never think of. I suppose it was a dreadful temptation, and she must have resisted it a great many times before she gave in. If she is dishonest, it is sure to be found out, but I don't want it to be through me.'

'Why didn't you speak to her about it?'

'Oh, I couldn't! The very thought of any talk of that kind makes my heart beat; you forget the state my nerves are in! Besides, of course, she would deny

having taken it. Only I felt I ought to warn you not to leave valuables lying about in that careless way we have.'

'I should think so! I believe the girl has been at my things to-day. I am sure she has! I left my bracelets in the lower part of my case when I went out, I am absolutely certain, and here is one of them in the tray, and another lying on the dressing-table.'

'Everything is there, isn't it, Edie?' Blanche's voice was quite anxious.

'Yes, I think so. I shall keep everything locked up carefully enough in future. Now, where shall I put the key, where she wouldn't be likely to get at it? I know . . . I shall hide it under the paper in the drawer where I keep my brush and comb. She will have to hunt about a good deal to find it there!'

At that instant a knock was heard at the door, and Mary's pleasant voice saying—

'If you please, miss, the mistress sent to tell you that tea has come up.'

The two girls soon left the room; but there were still people about the passage, and Milly kept to her hiding-place, her heart a surging mass of wicked feelings.

Mary was engaged to Malcolm, was she? That was the end, then, of all her own hopes! She had known it from the first! Mary had tried to cut her out, and she had succeeded. But Mary should not have him yet, if that marriage could be stopped, whether by hook or by crook! Milly had all the obstinacy of a weak nature, and all the vindictiveness of a small one.

Why had not Miss Blanche accused Mary of the theft she was so sure she had committed? Milly next asked herself. Malcolm certainly would never marry a

convicted thief. But Mary was still suspected; there was hope that if anything else should disappear, it would certainly be put down to her.

Just then the door opened, and Mary came in to light the fire. It took some time to light, for the wind was in the wrong quarter, and the wood rather damp. And Mary was able, while she held a paper in front of the grate, to read a letter she had just received—her first letter from Malcolm. It contained a photograph of himself, which he had had taken with the express purpose of presenting it to her.

Perhaps Mary took a little longer about lighting the fire than she need have. Before it was alight Kate's voice was heard at the door.

'Whatever has been keeping you all this time over that fire, Mary?'

Mary made no reply, for she felt that if she did trust herself with an answer it would be a cross one. After all, she could not have been much longer than usual.

'It is burning now,' was all she said as she came to the door.

'And I should hope so, after you've been half an hour about it.'

'Only ten minutes,' replied Mary, able to speak quietly now, after the check she had given to her first impulse of impatience.

'I looked at the clock when I heard you go into that room, Mary,' Kate answered impressively; 'and that was thirty-one minutes ago. I was in the next room, so there isn't no use your denying it.'

This was the last Milly heard. The next minute she had stolen over to the dressing-table. Her fingers were fumbling about beneath the paper in the brush and comb drawer. She was unlocking the jewel-case;

she was taking out the emerald and diamond ring—no, the bracelet would be better, that was larger—a ring might slip away and escape discovery. But why not keep the ring herself? Every stone in it was worth ten pounds! That would give her the start in life which was the one thing she had always wanted. And in London it would bring her in fifty pounds at least. She would leave the Bridgers, leave Exbridge altogether, and, with the money to go anywhere she liked, her sin would never find her out. While in the meantime Mary . . .

With beating heart Milly was hastening from the room, along the passage, up the stairs to Mary's room. Mary's box was locked, but it would not be difficult to find the key of that. Yes . . . here it was, in her handbag! Milly unfastened the box, and, reaching her arm down to the bottom of it, deposited the bracelet there; then rapidly fastened it up again, returned the key to the handbag, hurried down the stairs, and along the passage, now empty, to the schoolroom. Luck was with her, she said to herself with a hollow laugh; for she had met no one on the way, though a quick step went along the passage just after she had shut the door—Mary running up to hide Malcolm's photograph in her box. Some girls would have had it framed in their rooms, but to Mary, just now, her love was too sacred a thing for that.

When Mary came in to lay the table for tea, Milly did not dare look in her face. She busied herself with the books on the shelf, keeping her back to her cousin. The sound of Mary's voice made her start.

'Tea's ready, Milly. I've brought you up some water-cresses. Jem came with a basket of them this afternoon, and I know you're fond of them.'

'Oh, thanks.' Milly was still looking about for some mysterious volume.

'Good-night.' Milly would have left before Mary came to clear the tea things away.

When Mary had shut the door behind her, Milly sank into a chair, cold and trembling. The consciousness of the enormity of her crime was coming over her, the frightful wickedness of which she had been guilty towards the innocent woman whose ruin she had compassed. She was not penitent, but she was frightened. So terribly frightened was she, that had the house been empty, and no fear of detection withheld her, Milly would now have gone up to Mary's room, taken the bracelet from the place where she had hidden it, and returned both that and the precious ring. But the house was far from empty ; there were people about it in all directions now. To attempt any such action would be madness. Unable to eat in her present state of excitement, Milly poured out a little tea into her cup, and crumbled some bread upon her plate, not to arouse suspicion by any unusual appearances, and stole out of the house with the ring inside her glove, and hastened home.

Locking herself into the room, Milly sat down and wrote the following letter :—

'DEAREST TOTO,—You always said Mr. Stewart was fond of me, didn't you? Well, he proposed to me yesterday, and he has given me this lovely engagement ring. I'm so awfully hard up, though, that I shall have to part with it for a little while, just until my next salary is paid. I don't like to take it to anyone in Exbridge, for fear he should hear about it and be angry with me, so will you please to do it for me in London? I want to raise fifty pounds on it, if I can. It ought to be worth more than that. You won't

breathe a word about the affair, I know. Malcolm would be so mad if he found out. Of course it is only for a few weeks, but he wouldn't understand. It's such a comfort to have friends like you, I know that I can trust.—Your loving MILLY.'

Milly put the ring into a box with the letter folded up small, and made a secure parcel with much brown paper and string and sealing-wax, and took it to the post.

'Anything of value?' asked the clerk. 'If so, you'd better have it registered.'

'It isn't very precious,' Milly replied, with a deceitful laugh. 'But if it only costs twopence to register, I may as well make it safe.'

She paid her fee, took the little slip of tinted paper, which she hid in the back of her purse, and returned home, her remorse having now given way to a sense of triumph.

'I've got the better of Miss Mary at last!' she said to herself. 'She will never have Malcolm now!'

Unless there were company at the house, or any other extra demands on the parlour-maids, there was generally a little space after the servants' supper before Mary had to set to work again, and this was the time she took for her night devotions, as she was less tired then than when bedtime came, and had also her room to herself. Everyone was in an indulgent mood to-day, and Mrs. Beddoes had told her slily, that if she wanted to write a line to her lover she might run out and post it when she came down. Mary did want to write him a line, to let him know that it was all right about his coming to see her, and also a letter to her mother, to tell her what he had said the evening before. She wrote her letters, took them down, and ran with them

to the post-box, that they might catch the last post, and then went up to her room again for her reading.

She had remembered where that text came from, the Epistle of St. James. She soon found it and read the whole verse through. 'Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low.' Why should anyone rejoice at being made low, she wondered?

As Mary sat pondering over the question, and recalling the lessons of meekness and endurance which just now she had to confess to herself were a subject somewhat distasteful to her, a step was heard on the stairs. The door was burst open by Kitty, who came in with such an excited air that Mary exclaimed, 'Why, what's the matter?'

'You're to come downstairs at once, Mary! We've all got to go into the library, every one of us, Mrs. Beddoes and all. The colonel's in a rage, fit to blow your head off, calling out about the police, and I don't know what! Something of Miss Edith's has been stolen.'

'Stolen?'

Mary's thoughts at once flew to the missing sovereign.

'Now it will be found out who the thief really was!' she thought, with a throb of joy. Then she chid herself, remembering how terrible a disclosure, with what terrible consequences, it would be to the culprit, whoever that might be.

The rest of the servants were all waiting in the passage for Mary's arrival. They filed into the library in a line and stood round the room, the different expressions on their faces betokening the difference within, which would have been an interesting study to the student of human nature. Jenny's was awe-

stricken, Kitty's tearful, that of the nurse full of indignant pride, Johnson's scornful and angry. Mrs. Beddoes looked terribly concerned, and Kate's face wore an inscrutable expression; she kept her eyes averted from Mary, and Mary felt, with a glow of wrath she did not succeed in repressing, that Kate imagined she knew beforehand who was the thief.

The colonel stood in a black rage and with trembling fingers, for he was a nervous man, though determined now to exhibit nothing but firmness. Mrs. Bridger and his sons and daughters stood beside him, looking curiously into the faces of the servants, and each making his or her own surmise about the thief. Miss Blanche held her handkerchief to her eyes, and Mrs. Bridger her smelling-bottle to her nose.

'Something has just occurred in this house,' began the colonel, 'which has never occurred before. A very valuable bracelet and ring have disappeared from Miss Edith's dressing-case, and I have determined to discover the thief.'

A sort of court-martial was then instituted. A succession of questions was asked, which led to the information that only Kate and Mary, and the little kitchen-maid, who had run up to her room and down again, had been on the first floor during the time within which the jewellery had been stolen. Miss Blanche and Miss Edith were called upon to give their information, which they did with some reluctance, Miss Blanche, in fact, dissolving into hysterical tears when her evidence was demanded of her.

Mrs. Bridger, glad to escape from this trying scene, seized the opportunity for conducting her daughter away, while Edith in a straightforward manner told everything her sister had told to her, while Mary

listened, her wide-open eyes fixed on the speaker, to the story of the two ten-shilling bits and the sovereign. Then Miss Edith explained how carefully she had locked up her jewellery and hidden the key, but that, just as she was telling her sister where she intended to put it, Mary had come to the door, and must, as it appeared, have overheard her words. When she went up to dress for dinner, Edith had taken the key of her dressing-case out of the drawer and put it in her pocket, and at bedtime, a quarter of an hour ago now, she had unfastened it again to put away her necklace. Then she had discovered that the ring and bracelet were missing, and calculated the period at which they must have been abstracted.

Kate next gave her short evidence, saying how long Mary had been over lighting the fire. She displayed more feeling in the matter than Mary would have expected; it really grieved her to think the girl who had been so good a help to her had turned out so disgracefully.

'Now, Mary, what have you to say for yourself?' asked the colonel, while all eyes were fixed on her.

'I know nothing about either the ring or the bracelet, sir,' answered Mary firmly; on which a murmur of shocked astonishment went through the room at her brazenness. Had they all turned against her so suddenly, they who had been heaping their congratulations upon her for the last twenty-four hours?

A spring of bitterness rose up in Mary's soul. Then to her memory there rushed two words: one was, 'Hosanna!' the other was, 'Crucify!' Mr. Vincent had been right when, once, he told his class, that, in faint, far-off semblance, the different phases of our Saviour's life were reproduced in those of His

followers. That thought held the bitterness in check. Why should they believe in her against all evidence? she asked herself. What but her pride made her expect it of them?

One of Colonel Bridger's sons said a few words in a low tone to his father, in response to which the colonel nodded.

'You can all leave the room,' he said, 'except Mary.'

So Mary stood alone before her accusers. The colonel then addressed her.

'Now, Mary, you've heard everything that has been said. I am going to give you a last chance. If you will confess to having taken the bracelet and the ring, and give them back to us, I shall not send for the police; but if you deny it still . . .'

'And if it is found that you really were guilty,' put in Mr. Harold, whose part it generally was to act as a modifier to his father's statements.

'. . . you shall suffer the penalty of the law,' ended the colonel.

'I know nothing about either of them, sir,' Mary replied, just as she had before.

'Have you any idea yourself as to who took them, then?' asked Mr. Harold.

'No, sir.'

'Then . . .' began the colonel impetuously. Again his son interposed.

'In law we take it that everyone is innocent till he is proved guilty. We must remember that we have no proof against Mary yet.'

Mary turned a grateful look on him, and he spoke again.

'You are sure that you can give us no clue as to who the thief was . . . or that if you do know anything

about the matter, you will not tell? We shall be obliged to search your things, if you refuse.'

'I cannot tell you anything, and I would rather you did look through my things, sir,' Mary answered, quickly and eagerly.

'So we shall,' replied the colonel. 'And if the jewellery is not found with your property, we shall search through the boxes of everyone else in the house. We had better send for the police,' turning to his son.

'That will hardly be necessary at the first go-off, will it?' said Mr. Harold. 'If Mary gives us her keys, we can do the searching ourselves.'

The colonel rang the bell, and, without waiting for it to be answered, went to the door and called out, 'Mrs. Beddoes.'

'Why don't you confess, Mary?' said Miss Edith hurriedly. 'It will save you a great deal if you do. I don't want to see you punished; all I want is to get back my bracelet and ring.'

'Whoever the real thief is, is certain to be detected,' Mr. Harold added.

'I hope she will be, sir,' said Mary.

Then Mrs. Beddoes appeared, and there was a procession upstairs, headed by the colonel, and consisting, besides, of Mrs. Beddoes, Mr. Harold, Mary herself, with Mr. Edward, Miss Edith, and Miss Dora, all too much excited to remain below. They quite filled the little bedroom.

Mary threw open her drawers and gave up the key of her box. She could not think about meekness now; her whole soul was aflame with anger. Though she courted nothing more than a thorough investigation, it was with a haughtiness one of the young ladies could not have equalled, had she been

suspected of theft, that Mary saw Mrs. Beddoes, at the colonel's directions, taking one thing after another out of the tray of her box and searching into every corner. There was nothing in the tray, any more than there had been in her drawers, and if Mary had been in a different mood she could not but have noticed the look of relief, amounting to satisfaction, on every face, even the colonel's, in spite of his terrible frown. The neat layers of clothes were quickly removed from the lower part of the box. The ordeal was nearly over, when . . .

An exclamation escaped from every lip, as Mrs. Beddoes held up the bracelet.

'It is a pity you did not confess,' said Mr. Harold, turning to Mary coolly, and without losing his judicial calm.

'Someone has put it there!' Mary cried.

'Who?' asked Mr. Harold.

Very little attention was paid now to Mary. Everybody was busy hunting once more through her things, in search of the missing ring. She watched their hands upon them; she caught the look of contemptuous pity in every eye that was cast upon her. There was her work-bag being turned inside out upon the bed, and its contents eagerly searched through, the pockets of her gowns, the box which held her gloves and collars; every little receptacle she had was ransacked, her Bible was shaken out, and the texts and flowers that fell from it pounced upon, in the hope that the missing ring might have been secreted with them. Malcolm's photograph was taken out of its envelope, and the corners of the envelope searched out.

'Why don't you say where it is? This can't be very pleasant for you,' said Mr. Harold in his un-

concerned voice; and Mary had to hold back her hand, not to give him a blow in the face!

The ordeal was over at last. The ring was certainly not among Mary's possessions, though Miss Edith was still searching in her jacket, thrusting her fingers in between the outside and the lining. And they began to discuss before her, as if she had been a block of stone, what she had probably done with it. Mrs. Beddoes reluctantly confessed that she had allowed Mary to go out that evening and post a letter, and received a sharp reproof.

'Go to the post-office at once, and find out what has been sent from there to-night,' said the colonel excitedly. It was represented to him that the post-office would be closed, and Mrs. Beddoes assured him that Mary had not been out long enough to go anywhere further than the post-box.

'But she may have met a friend in the street, and given it to him—or her,' somebody suggested. And Mary had still to listen.

'Well, I shall send for the police at once,' said the colonel.

'Better wait till the morning,' Mr. Harold said. 'If we lock this door it will be all right.'

So Mary was locked into the room, and she heard the voices of the party who were discussing her guilt, and the best means for its complete discovery, as they went down the stairs.

A little later the door was unlocked, and Kitty came in. Mrs. Beddoes' voice was heard outside saying—

'It's my orders to keep the key turned, you know; I shall come and let you out to-morrow morning at six.'

Kitty entered, and began to undress silently, casting

furtive glances at Mary now and then, but saying nothing. Thanks to Mary's example, she had resumed the habit of saying her prayers night and morning, and this evening, after a moment's hesitation, she knelt down. Presently Mary heard that she was crying.

It was the first thing that brought her to herself. Till then she had stood in the same position she had done through the searching of her possessions, dazed with the fearful and mysterious trouble that had come upon her, her heart congealed, so that she could neither weep nor pray. Kitty rose from her knees with red, streaming eyes, and looked once again at Mary.

'Shall I help you put your things away?' she asked timidly. They were still tossed about in confusion, as they had been left.

'There's no good,' answered Mary in a dry, hard tone. 'They'll be taking me off to prison the first thing to-morrow. I shan't be allowed to have my own things there.'

It seemed to her indeed as if nothing in life belonged to her now—her hopes, her happiness, her reputation were all gone. The very clothes she wore would be taken from her when she went to gaol. Kitty began to cry again.

'You'd better let me pick them up,' she said.

Mary watched her, and gradually her throat swelled.

'Kitty,' she burst out at last, 'can't you think of anything, of anybody, who has done this to me? Somebody must have done it, you know, but I can't think who. I would never have believed there was anyone in the house who would do such a cruel thing!'

'Maybe it's only a trick, whoever did it,' said

Kitty, catching at a straw of consolation. 'They'll say out in the morning.'

Mary shook her head, and again sat silent. Who could have done it? How could she ever find out? What opportunity would she have of finding out? Every member of the household passed in turn before Mary's mind, and it seemed impossible to imagine any of them guilty of such a wicked act. When she came to Milly, indeed, there was a moment's flash of suspicion, but Mary cast it from her, ashamed of having for a moment harboured such a thought. It was a mystery.

When Kitty had finished putting Mary's things in order she looked at her again, timidly. It was so unnatural to see Mary sitting still like that, and with that look in her face. She came and sat down on the bed beside her, and threw her arms round her, bursting once more into tears.

'How cold you are, Mary!'

'Am I? I feel as if I were burning.'

'Aren't you going to say your prayers and go to bed?' she said at last. Mary rose mechanically and took off her cap and apron. She let down her hair, which fell round her like a cloak and warmed her; it was true that she was cold. By to-morrow night perhaps, she thought to herself, even her hair would not be left to her. She had heard that people's hair was cut off when they went to gaol.

She knelt down to say her prayers, but only one real prayer came—that her innocence might be proved, that she might not be allowed to suffer through the wicked devices of her unknown foe. Her usual petitions seemed to have no force in them, under her present conditions. How could she hope for a 'peaceful night's rest,' for a 'rising refreshed and

strengthened, for the duties of to-morrow'? What would to-morrow be for her?

Mary rose from her knees, undressed, and got into bed; but she slept little during the night. She recalled and tried to dwell upon the night spent by our Lord before His condemnation, and the way He bore Himself in the presence of His accusers; but His example seemed just now hopelessly high above her. Her heart cried out for justice; her one wish was that it might not prove God's will for her to suffer unjustly. Yet these thoughts of Him did her good. When morning came she rose to some extent refreshed and strengthened, determined to meet her trial as far as possible in a way worthy of her Christianity.

The bedroom door was unlocked for Kitty to go down to the kitchen at the usual hour, six. Mary kissed her before she went, and thanked her for her kindness.

'You don't believe I did it, do you, Kitty?' she said wistfully.

'No, nor I never shan't. And . . .' with an effort at hopefulness, 'I believe it'll all be found out to-day.'

'If it isn't, you'll still go on believing I am innocent?'

'Always!'

Then they kissed each other again, and looked the word they did not like to say, 'Good-bye.'

Kitty went out, and the door was locked again.

In the meantime the Bridgers had discussed the whole matter through and through, with the usual snaps of bad temper which, with them, invariably accompanied discussion.

'This is the pater's pet, that he was going to

give all our goods in charge of,' Master Edward said, as the family gathered round the drawing-room fire, after Mary had been locked in for the night.

'I always said the girl was far too young to be parlour-maid,' remarked Mrs. Bridger. 'It was just her pleasant manner that took you, Richard,' addressing her husband. 'But one really knew very little about her beyond her having a smiling face and being obliging and quick.'

'She was a clever servant,' growled the colonel.

'Too clever by half!' responded Edward. 'She must have been pretty quick on this occasion too, as to her ears, at any rate.'

'Did she come to us with a good character for honesty?' asked Dora.

'She had never been in service before,' said Mrs. Bridger. 'But she belonged to a most respectable family, quite superior people, so Christabel Fitzjames said.'

'Oh, she's one of Chrissie's protégées, is she?' responded Edith. 'Christabel is always taking people up, you know, in that impulsive way of hers. Don't you remember the gipsy girl they took to live at the Hall, and that Chrissie made quite a friend of? And she turned out so badly, they had to send her away in the end. I never should go by *her* recommendations!'

The colonel agreed that if Mary's character for honesty had never been proved, it was not so surprising that she should have acted as she had, and began to scold his wife for having taken her with no more certain recommendations.

'It is a good thing she did not steal the whole contents of my jewel-case,' said Edith, 'though I wish she hadn't happened to choose my emerald ring.'

'We may get it again yet,' said Dora. 'Probably the girl has it somewhere about her. Mrs. Beddoes ought to have searched her; but she seemed so upset at having to look through her box, that one did not like to suggest it. That will be done at the police station.'

'You are all taking it absolutely for granted that the girl has stolen the things,' remarked Harold, in his quiet voice. 'The circumstantial evidence is overwhelmingly against her, of course, enough to convict her in any court of law, but I should like to point out that nothing can be absolutely proved by circumstantial evidence.'

'How could the bracelet have got into Mary's box, if she didn't put it there?'

'Somebody else could have put it there.'

'But who?'

'That's another question. All I pointed out was . . .'

'Mary is such a favourite with all the other servants,' broke in Edith; 'except perhaps Johnson, and she is in such a good temper now that it would be the last time she would be likely to do a spiteful thing. Besides, all the servants except Kate and Mary proved to be in other places at the time the theft was committed.'

'The servants are not the only people in the world,' replied Harold, as aggravatingly calm as ever. 'There is the little governess, for instance.'

'As if a governess would steal!' There was a moment's pause to consider, however.

'Besides, Miss Ladbroke is a relation of Mary's, isn't she?' said Dora. 'Even if she had taken to stealing, and wanted to put us off the scent by hiding something in one of the servants' boxes,

which seems a far-fetched enough idea, she would have chosen any other of them rather than her own cousin.'

'Besides, she could have had no notion where to look for the key,' remarked Edith. 'What made us pretty sure Mary was the culprit from the beginning, apart from the money she stole . . . Well . . .' as Harold opened his mouth again . . . 'we *think* she stole, was her being the only person who could have heard me say where I intended to hide the key.'

After this they dispersed and went to bed, all full of vexation, mingled with feelings towards Mary varying from unmixed indignation on the part of Edith to positive compassion on that of Blanche.

CHAPTER XI

ARRESTED

WHEN morning came, the family made the breakfast-table the scene of a final consultation regarding the fate of Mary.

Edith had cooled down a little in the night.

'I don't care about having the girl punished,' she said. 'All I want really is to get my ring back. If she confesses what she has done, and tells me what she has done with it, I would rather father didn't prosecute her.'

'If!' responded Edward provokingly. 'But if she won't confess?'

'She must be made to confess. Harold, you must get it out of her. Surely a barrister who is so fond of cross-examining ought to be able to do that much.'

'We brought a certain amount of pressure to bear on her last night, you know.'

'Well, you must bring more this morning. It is simply absurd for her to go off to prison, and for me to lose my ring. Say to her, that if she even tells us what she has done with it we will let her off; but if she won't, she shall be "prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law," and let her see we

mean it. She can't be such an idiot as to go on with her obstinacy after that.'

'I will try,' said Harold, though not as if he enjoyed the prospect. 'But I don't believe she'll tell.'

'Perhaps there is somebody else mixed up in it,' suggested Dora, with a bright idea,—she, in common with Milly, was a great novel-reader,—'and she wants to shelter him. What about her young man?'

'Do you know who her "young man" is?' asked Blanche. 'Beddoes told me this morning. It is Mr. Stewart at the Bank.'

'Tyrwhitt's friend? No, really! Well, it's a good thing for Mr. Stewart it has been found out what the girl is in time. He has had a happy escape!' remarked Edith.

Then silence fell, for there stood Mary before them, at Mrs. Beddoes' side, with her large eyes fixed on the speaker, and her face turning white.

'Take her into the study, Beddoes,' said the colonel.

'Now, my dear,' said Mrs. Beddoes, as they left the room, her heart touched with compassion by Mary's face, as she heard those words: 'You take my advice. You say you didn't take them, and I declare I believe you! I can't bring myself to think it of you, that you'd do a thing like that. But there ain't the least bit of good in your denying it. It'll just make the colonel in a greater fury. He's so worked up this morning as I've never seen him. He'll have you up before the magistrate before you're an hour older, and you'll be sent to prison for who knows how long? Sir Barnaby's known for his hard sentences, and once you're shut up, there's an end of it, and you wouldn't be able to do a thing

towards finding out who it was that put the bracelet in your box. If you was out, you could get all your friends to help you, and see the police, and maybe it would be discovered.'

'How can I confess what I never did? What should I tell them that I had done with the ring?'

'Anything you like. Say you took it out and dropped it on the way, or had it snatched from you. It don't matter what you say. Just let the colonel cool down out of this rage, and he'll be as glad as you are that you're not in prison. He has a good heart, though he has such a temper; and in a week's time you might tell him again you're innocent, and just said that to put him off, and he wouldn't be hard on you. But, as I say, once in prison no one can't get you out. Why, even if you was proved innocent, there would be a lot of fuss before they'd let you free. I knew a case where a person was convicted for something they hadn't done, and afterwards it was found out who it was, and it took such a time having the case tried again and getting a "pardon" as it was called, from the Home Secretary, and all that sort of thing, that it was a month before they could get the innocent one let out. It's better to do anything than be put into gaol.'

Her words presented to Mary a temptation of a kind that had never assailed her before. Yet it was hardly a temptation; it just brushed against her soul, and was gone. A long habit of uprightness had rendered shifty dealings impossible for her.

'Will you leave the room, Beddoes?' Mr. Harold said, as he entered the study with an utterly impassive face.

At sight of him Mary brought herself on guard,

remembering that strange episode the evening before, when she had felt inclined to strike him.

'Well, Mary,' he said, shutting the door behind him, and fixing his eyes upon her. 'Everything is found out.'

She gave a little cry, and the joy that leapt up in her heart shone in her face and sparkled in her eyes.

'Who did it, sir?'

Harold had looked for a frightened start or a sullen defiance of manner, and the different reception that his words met with silenced him.

'The girl is innocent,' he said to himself. 'She must be either innocent or a consummate actor.'

'Wait here a moment,' was what he said aloud. Then glancing at the open window, 'You won't try and escape?'

'Escape, sir?' said Mary. Then she laughed, taking it for a joke. She did not realise that Mr. Harold had been acting on what had struck him as an ingenious plan for startling the truth from her, so that his own mind might be clearly convinced before he began to try and extort a confession.

'Well, you haven't been long about it, Harold!' exclaimed his sisters eagerly. 'What does she say?'

'Has she given you the ring?'

'I thought that a night of cool consideration would bring her to her senses.'

'She has confessed nothing,' answered Harold to the simultaneous exclamations of his family. 'I don't believe she ever took the things.'

Then they all set upon him for proofs. He had no proofs to offer, 'nothing to say,' as Edith put

it contemptuously, 'except that her manner made him think her innocent. As if a girl like that, who had had the whole night to decide on what line she should take, would not be capable of acting innocence, and avoiding being taken off her guard!'

'I shouldn't have thought you such a fool, Harold!' said the colonel.

That was too much for Harold. In his quiet way he had a temper as fierce as was his father's, and a more effectual one, from the fact of its being kept outwardly in control.

'Very well,' he said; 'I wash my hands of the affair. If you all choose to call me an idiot, you're welcome to. I shall not take another step in the matter.'

'I will take all the steps that are wanted!' cried the colonel, in a towering rage; and to the study he strode himself, once more launching invectives against the folly of his son, when he found Mary left alone in a room opening on to the garden.

'Now, Mary, I'm going to give you one chance more,' he said; 'one last chance before sending for the police. Miss Edith says, if you will give up the ring at once, or even tell us what you have done with it, she will let you off the punishment which, I must say, you richly deserve.'

Mary had spent the last five minutes in a state of such relief and thankfulness as had made her eyes dim. Her prayer, she thought, had been answered; that eager, passionate prayer which had hardly found breath to say, 'If it be Thy will.' Now, with the cruel disappointment, her heart felt congealed.

'But Mr. Harold said everything was found out!' she faltered.

'So it was, last night, when the bracelet was

discovered in your box. No one in his senses could have any doubts after that. However, the magistrate will settle the truth about it. Thomas' — calling through the window to the garden boy—'go at once for the police. Tell them that there has been a robbery in the house!'

Mary stood erect and haughty; she had just enough strength, after her meditations on the endurance of Christ, to follow His silence, but was conscious, with a bitter sense of defeat, how widely different from His humility was the spirit which surged within her.

But, as the minutes passed, of which so few remained, before what semblance of liberty was left her came to an end, the thought of those at home came over Mary, and forced her to bring her pride under enough to ask a favour.

'Will you let them know at home, sir?' she asked, turning on the colonel a pair of eyes, which he used in after days to say he could not get out of his mind. 'Might someone go and tell my father, and ask him to break it to mother? If she were told suddenly, it might kill her. Her heart is weak.'

'Yes—yes—the girl's people ought to be told,' said the colonel, addressing his family. 'Thomas has gone off.'

'Couldn't we send Miss Ladbroke?' suggested Dora, under her breath. 'She would be able to tell them kindly. It will be a shock to the Turnbulls, I should think, unless Mary had kleptomaniac habits at home, which were not mentioned to us.'

The colonel, for all his wrath, found it trying to stand waiting with the tragic figure of Mary before his eyes, and he hastened upstairs, and threw open the door of the schoolroom. Here another face met him almost as tragic. As Milly caught sight of his

wrathful countenance, she thought that everything had been discovered; her knees knocked together; her face turned white.

A touch of compassion came over the colonel.

'You've heard what's happened?' he said. 'That precious Mary has turned out a thief. There, don't cry like that! You can't help it if she is your cousin. It's a disgraceful thing, but it's not your fault. What I want you to do is to jump into a cab and drive over to the girl's home, and tell her father what has happened—her father, mind; she says her mother's got a weak heart. Tell him we are going off with her to the police court at once, so he'd better make haste there, if he wants to see her before she's shut up.'

'Oh, poor Mary! poor Mary!' Milly cried, weeping and trembling still. Her tears were not feigned; the horror of what she had done had come over her, though she had not the courage to take the backward step which would put herself in Mary's place.

The bad books which Milly had been reading put love, according to their meaning of the word, in the place of every other principle; all was fair that was done out of love. What would otherwise be hideous crimes became not only excusable, but picturesque and spirited actions, when love of a man for a woman, or of a woman for a man, was the motive. This course of reading had vitiated Milly's moral perceptions, and made it possible for her to commit the wicked deed of the night before; but all the teachings of her girlhood had not been so entirely obliterated that she was not now keenly conscious of the depravity of her act, and she had lain awake all night, a prey to remorse.

With some sort of perverted process of faith, she had persuaded herself that the fate she had compassed

for Mary would not be allowed to fall on her innocent head. She would be sent away from her place, but that would be all.

And now, with an again perverted sense of compassion, she blamed the Bridgers for cruelty, in their summary handing over the supposed culprit to the law.

She began to plead with the colonel that Mary might be spared a trial, but he brushed her remonstrances away.

'Your feelings are very natural,' he said; 'they do you credit; but I can't allow a woman to rob us, and then stand out in the face of facts with a brazen-faced obstinacy like hers, saying she's innocent, and let her off. If she had chosen to confess, I should have spared her. Now,' he went on, 'the thing for you to do is to go off and break it to her family.'

'I can't!—oh, sir, I couldn't!' cried the miserable Milly.

The colonel's anger reasserted itself. 'Nonsense! You can do what you're told to do. Put on your hat this minute. I have enough of nerves in my own family, without my servants beginning to go in for them.'

Milly had no choice but to obey. As she passed Mary standing in the hall she averted her eyes; but Mary called to her.

'Milly! — you won't let them tell mother too suddenly, will you? And say — say — I am sure it will be all right; they can't send me to prison for what I've never done.'

Before Milly could attempt to make an answer, two policemen entered the hall. She saw Mary taken into custody, and was then hurried into a cab herself, on her way to Ravenhill Farm.

Terrible enough were Milly's feelings as the fly drew nearer and nearer the house where she had received so much kindness and hospitality, and where her own lips were to tell of the crushing misfortune that her own wicked act had brought upon them. So much did she shrink from the ordeal, that once she went so far as to put her head out of the window and call 'Stop,' and tell the driver to turn his horse's head and take her back to Exbridge; but the man did not hear her feeble voice, and reflection reminded her that such peculiar conduct was certain to draw suspicion upon her. She would have to carry the thing through, now she had started upon it, though already she began bitterly to regret the first step that was to cost her so dear. To regret, not to repent; there was no penitence towards God, no adequate sorrow for the misery she was bringing upon poor Mary; self was the main reason for her grief.

'Whoever is coming up to our door in a cab?' cried Jem, who was the first to see the unusual arrival, which filled him with boyish excitement.

'Why, it's Milly!' exclaimed Mrs. Love, as Milly alighted from the carriage. 'Bless us! what's brought her here at this time of the day? I hope it's no bad news!'

She had caught sight of the girl's face, and hurried out to hear the intelligence she came to bring, the first. Jem and Bobby ran down the path with her.

'Why, what's the matter?' asked Mrs. Love, as, at sight of them, Milly began to tremble all over, and burst into tears.

'It's poor Mary!' Milly murmured between her sobs. 'She's been taken up for stealing, and the colonel says

to tell Uncle Samuel to go into Exbridge to the police court.'

And Milly turned again to the cab, desirous of fleeing away before she met Mary's mother. But Mrs. Love seized her by the arm.

'Come in, girl,' she said, 'and tell us all about it. Your uncle's in the farther pasture. Jem, you run up and fetch him.'

'Our Mary taken up for stealing!' exclaimed Jem. 'Well, that's a fine joke! They will feel small when they find out who it is that's really done it.'

'Mary taken up for stealing!' Jock had just run out of the house, and his horror-stricken face gave Milly a fresh stab.

'Whoever has dared say such a wicked thing?' he burst out in his wrath. 'Was it the colonel? I'll go and kill him, that I will! Polly a thief!'

Bobby fell crying, and Mrs. Turnbull, hearing the commotion from within, came running to find out what had happened.

Mrs. Love had by now succeeded in getting the story out of Milly, and, taking her sister-in-law into the parlour, she broke to her what had occurred, while Milly was left under fire of the sharp cross-questioning of the three boys, who insisted on hearing every detail that she could furnish.

'Who do you really think did it?'

'They'll never let her go to prison without confessing it was them?'

'Oh, Milly, you don't think anyone could be so wicked as all that?'

'They must have done it for a joke; but when they find it's been took in earnest they'll tell.'

That was Jem's decision. He would not bring

himself to believe that Mary was in real danger of conviction for what, it must be so clear to everyone who knew her, she never could have done.

When he had got all there was to be had out of Milly, Jem set off as fast as his legs would carry him in search of his father, whistling as well as he could at such a pace, to assure himself that this was all a joke.

In the meantime Mrs. Turnbull had taken the news with more courage than those who knew her nervous temperament would have expected.

'They never can convict my Mary,' she said, weeping, but not hysterically; and she came out of the parlour to kiss Milly and thank her for coming to tell them.

'So that your uncle will be able to go down and make it all right,' she said. 'I shall tell him to bring her home straight off. She shan't go back to that house, where they've dared say such a cruel thing of her! It was a cruel thing, wasn't it, Milly, dear? I can't think how the mistake has been, but I don't feel, whatever it was, that they could be excused for suspecting her.'

She sat, holding Milly's hand and asking her anxious questions, all the time the boys were searching for their father; a long time it seemed, and indeed was, for Turnbull had left the farther pasture, and gone up to the Hall to find if Mr. Fitzjames were at home, and had to be followed there.

Mr. Fitzjames was out, and Turnbull went on to the agent's house, so that the boys missed him altogether, and it was not till twelve o'clock, when he came home for his dinner, that he was met with the tidings whose heaviness he at least appreciated.

'Good heaven!' he exclaimed, his broad red face losing half its colour. 'Mary in the police court now! Why, her trial will be on almost before I can get there!'

He stopped but for one word with his wife before jumping into the cab, which Mrs. Love had had the presence of mind to retain, and urged the driver to keep his horse at a gallop the whole way into Exbridge.

Milly insisted on going back with him, for she felt anything would be better than sitting beside Mrs. Turnbull, listening to her gentle, loving voice, asking again and again how her poor Mary looked, what was the message she had sent, how long they were likely to keep her at the police court.

'She won't be with us before tea time, I suppose. We must have something nice for her, Alice,' she said. 'I don't believe she'll have had a dinner, and if those people are so heartless as to say that she's a thief, as like as not they'll have let her leave the house without her breakfast.'

These were the last words Milly heard her utter, just as Turnbull was coming up to the door, with the final tender, 'And you'll stay and have it with us, won't you, dear? It's a comfort to me having you here, and so feeling about it. But I always knew you two were fond of each other at bottom, though you did have your little tiffs.'

Milly could stand no more, and said she must go back; but her drive into Exbridge was actually worse than the drive out had been. Turnbull was not a man given to strong language, but he found it hard work keeping back his invectives against the person, whoever it might be, that had done Mary this wrong. Milly, who had never seen him angry before, cowered beneath his rage, and her heart turned faint, when she heard him prophesy the fearful vengeance that would come upon the head of the man or woman who had contrived to bring the punishment of his own guilt on Mary.

'I feel so sick, uncle, I think I'll go in home. Won't you tell the cabman to stop at the corner of Gladstone Road?' she pleaded.

Then Turnbull asked her pardon for not having been able to restrain himself better, and spoke some kind words, which filled the cup of Milly's misery to the brim.

'When the truth was known!' as the words went that she had been hearing so often this morning,—always spoken with such absolute conviction that it was a case of *when*, not *if*—what would the feelings of all those loving hearts be towards her?

When! What a fearful when! Was it true, as her uncle had said, that she might then be condemned to years of penal servitude, in expiation of her guilt?

While this was going on at the farm, Mary was awaiting her trial in one of the cells underneath the police court. There were two other occupants of the cell, one a woman who was accused of the manslaughter of her child, the other one who had been taken up for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. The latter had not yet got over the effects of her drinking bout, and burst out occasionally into evil language and snatches of low songs. Mary, from the farthest corner of the cell, looked at her bloated, repulsive face, with its red eyelids and hideous smile, and at the repellent countenance of the woman who had killed her child in a fit of rage, with a horror and a shrinking from the thought of being numbered with such as these that for a time absorbed all other feelings.

Mary had never before come into close contact with wickedness in any form, and it positively frightened her. When the old drunkard addressed her unpleasing conversation to her, entitling her 'my dear,' she shuddered. When the other woman turned her angry

eyes on her, she had an idea that the next moment she might be sprung upon and murdered.

Mary thought of the women who gave their lives to working among the lowest and most depraved of their own sex, and, with a sense of humiliation, compared herself with them. A ripe Christian, such as she had read of in books, would have found this an occasion to speak words that might have proved helpful to these two poor sinners. But no such words came to Mary's lips ; she was conscious of no sensation towards her companions in misfortune except repulsion. She found it better not to look at them at all, and tried to concentrate her thoughts on the near future ; but everything ahead of her seemed a horrible blank.

Her thoughts turned to Malcolm. If anybody could save her, it would be he. But the comfort she found for a moment in the supporting thought of her lover was soon chilled by an icy suspicion. The Bridgers had taken it for granted that he would believe in her guilt and cast her off. What if they were right? In the ebbing condition of her faith and hope, love itself tottered, the trust at least which is an essential of perfect love.

There was a long, long time to wait before her father appeared. The sight of his agitated face did not inspire Mary with fresh confidence.

'My dear girl!' he said. 'My dear girl, what is the meaning of all this? Who do you suppose has done it? We've got to get on to the right track pretty sharp, you know. But we'll have them out, if lawyers can do it. I was going round to Mr. Ommaney's before I came here, but I thought I had best see you first, and find out what you say we'd better do.'

'There's nothing to be done, father. Nothing that I can think of, and I've been thinking all day long,

and pretty nearly the whole night long before. They found the bracelet in my box yesterday evening. My only chance is, if the person who put it there will confess; and that is no chance at all, for they would have done it before this, if they meant to at all.'

'Who was it, Mary? Who do you think it was? You've no idea?'

'None.'

For the idea of Milly was one which Mary had felt it wrong to harbour in her mind, while to suggest it would be wickedness almost equal to that of the unknown enemy who had brought her into this unmerited suspicion.

'But it must be someone, you know. We'll have detectives on. Some of those London people can get hold of a track where you would never have thought there was a chance of discovery. We'll have one down from one of those offices, and I'll get the best counsel there is to be had for you, Mary. There shan't be one stone unturned to show them you're innocent.'

'Dear father!' she responded, with a tremble in her voice, but no lack of decision. 'Do you think I'm going to let you ruin yourself like that? Why, those detectives, I don't know what they don't cost! And as for barristers, and all those people, just remember the poor Bensons. I was told that Charley's trial cost them seventy pounds, from first to last.'

'If it costs seven hundred, and I'd got to raise it by selling the clothes off my back, let alone the farm stock and the furniture—that is worth more than your expenses would come to—do you think I wouldn't do it for you, Mary?' His voice broke, and when he spoke again it was in accents more like his wife's,

when she was in one of her nervous moods, than his own strong hearty speech. 'You've been more to me than most daughters are to their own fathers, and I should be a thankless man if I wouldn't do for you what I would for one of my own children.'

'But you've got to think of them too, father.'

'Well, there isn't one of the boys but would rather go barefoot, than have their Polly shut up in prison.'

'If I can't make any more money for you,'—Mary's lip quivered, for one of her bitterest thoughts was how hard it would be for her ever again to find the means even of supporting herself, with the prison stain upon her,—'I won't take any of yours. No, father!'

But, for once, Turnbull was determined, decided to go against Mary herself, and insist on doing all that could be done to save her.

'And Malcolm will say the same,' he said. 'I have been to the Bank before I came here. He was out at lunch, but I left a line for him, telling him to come round here at once. I am going to get a solicitor now,' he ended. 'There's no time to be lost.'

There was not, for it was now half-past two.

Just as Turnbull went, the woman accused of manslaughter was summoned from the cell, leaving Mary as the sole recipient of the disorderly old woman's conversation.

'You take it hard, my dear,' she said. 'It's your first conviction, maybe. When you get to the eighteenth, like I've done—bless you, you won't think nothing of it! Seventeen times before, I've been had up!' with a chuckle, that was almost one of triumph. 'Four times I got off, and the other times I got in.'

She burst into a fit of laughter over her joke, and continued for a long time to chuckle in a way that made Mary's horror of the miserable old creature greater than before. At intervals she narrated in exultant style the way she had tricked the doctor, and got taken into the infirmary, 'when there was no more the matter with me than there is with you, my dear,' by covering her tongue with scrapings of lime from the walls of her cell; of the courage with which she had slanged the chaplain; of the occasion when it had taken a matron and two warders to get the handcuffs on to her wrists, when they were going to cut her hair; of the injuries she had succeeded in inflicting, by means of her nails and teeth, on the men who carried her off to 'the darks'; and how she had got the handcuffs off in time to throw them in the face of the officer who first opened the door of the punishment cell, to bring her meal of bread and water.

These and other reminiscences of the part of her young life which she had spent in a convict prison did not produce cheerful visions of the future, which Mary knew was almost inevitably before her. She was not aware of the changes in the direction of leniency which have been made in our penal system during the last fifty years, and there was a stamp of truth about the old woman's circumstantial narratives, as she grew more collected, and poured out her history into Mary's ears, that precluded the idea that she was telling falsehoods, or even materially exaggerating.

The whole time, Mary's eyes remained fixed on the door, expecting it to open and reveal the face of Malcolm. In this dire strait she craved, as she had never done for any human aid before, for his strong

presence. At last she needed a man to lean upon!

But no Malcolm came. He must have returned from his luncheon by now, and got the note. Then the Bridgers were right . . . No, that could not be; she would trust Malcolm through thick and thin! But, then, had she not been confident as she poured out her heart last night, that her innocence would be established, and what prospect was there of that now? If prayers such as those met with no answer, why should she trust in any man?

When Turnbull came back, it was not with the solicitor who was an old friend of the family, as he and Mary had hoped. Mr. Ommaney was away from home, and the only lawyer whose services Turnbull had been able to prccure at once, was a young man, unknown to either of them, who, as Mary felt sure from the moment he first addressed her, had not been convinced of her innocence by Turnbull's assertions.

'The only thing for us to do in this case,' he said, 'is to get witnesses to character. That will not be difficult, I suppose?'

Mary caught the note of uncertainty in his voice with hot, unreasonable wrath.

'No, indeed,' answered her father. 'Any one of the squire's family would speak for her, let alone all our friends. Why, there's no one for miles round . . .'

Mr. Jameson broke in.

'Sir Philip Fitzjames is abroad, isn't he?'

'Yes; and Miss Christabel and Mr. Vincent with him. There's no one but Mr. Fitzjames in England. He knows us all, but not Mary in particular.'

'And she was never in service before? There are

no previous employers, I mean, who could be referred to?'

'No.'

'Well, then, you will just have to get the best friends you have — I mean in the best position, and so on, to appear as witnesses for the defence. The magistrate will give you your choice,' the lawyer explained, turning to Mary, 'of being tried at once by him, or of having your case heard before a jury, and waiting over for the sessions. They open on the 14th; that will be time enough to collect what evidence we can get.'

'And in the meantime I should be taken to prison?'

'Yes; but you don't have such a hard time of it while you are awaiting trial. You can see your friends, and your people can provide you with meals, and furnish your cell for you, if they want to. Besides, you would probably be allowed bail, and then you could go home between.'

'Bail means paying a lot of money, doesn't it?'

'About twenty pounds, perhaps; that is, if bail is allowed. It is not always. But the money is returned when the person appears for trial.'

'Don't think about the money, Polly,' Turnbull whispered in her ear. 'I'll raise it somehow, don't you fear.'

'No, father, you shan't!' Mary answered, with a decision that was almost sharpness. 'I'd ten times rather spend the weeks in prison than have you get into the hands of money-lenders, or go begging about for me among our friends.'

Then she turned to Mr. Jameson.

'If I say I would rather be tried at once?'

'Well, then, you would be tried at once, with a few

days' remand probably, if the magistrate thinks it necessary to inquire into the case.'

'I shall ask to be tried at once.'

'If that's your decision, your father had better go straight off and collect his witnesses to your character.'

And Turnbull, feeling Mary's will once more, as was ever the case, stronger than his own, complied with Mr. Jameson's suggestion, and wrote a few hurried lines to several friends for him to take, while he himself set off in an opposite direction.

The lawyer turned at the door for a few parting words with Mary.

'I suppose you've made up your mind to be tried at once, because Mr. Healy, as a rule, gives shorter sentences than the Recorder. But you know it is tantamount to confessing yourself guilty.'

For a moment Mary was staggered.

'If I say I am not guilty?'

'Pleading "guilty" or "not guilty" is only a figure of speech. However, I don't say it is not your best plan. It will run your father into a lot of expense if he retains counsel for you, as he says he intends to. I don't honestly think that Sir Charles Plowden could get you a favourable verdict—unless, of course,' he added, 'the person who put the bracelet into your box chooses to confess in the meantime.'

Mary was fully conscious that the lawyer did not believe in the existence of any such individual, other than her own self; but that did not materially alter the force of his words, for who could expect such prompt repentance from the person who had been guilty of so deliberate an act of cruelty? Should she ask for trial before a jury, her father would be

plunged into great and almost certainly fruitless expense.

Mary's mind, which had wavered for an instant, was once more made up.

'Take my father's messages at once, please!' she said. 'I will be tried to-day.'

CHAPTER XII

SUMMARY CONVICTION

IN the meantime the colonel was in a state of nervous excitement, for which the worry over the affair of the bracelet was more accountable in an indirect than a direct way. The second post that morning had brought him a letter requesting his immediate presence in London, on business of great importance that was likely to occupy some time.

During the luncheon hour he had sought out the magistrate, and laid the state of the case before him, begging him that, unless Mary insisted upon having her trial postponed to the sessions, the case might be settled then and there.

'I had my pocket picked in London one day last summer,' he said, 'when I was due in Scotland next morning, and the whole thing was got through in the afternoon, at the Guildhall Police Court, so that I was able to leave by the night train. My present business is much more urgent, and what is the use of delays? The evidence against the girl is as clear as a pike-staff, and to have the thing preying on her mind would be as bad for her as it would for me. Run it through straight off, if you can, that's a good fellow!'

The 'good fellow,' who was an old friend of the colonel, promised to make as short an affair of Mary's trial as was consistent with allowing her the chance of making whatever defence was in her power, should she ask to be dealt with summarily; a matter which, he explained with a smile, must be left entirely to the decision of the accused, the Habeas Corpus Act not being to be abrogated for the sake of any private individual, however pressing might be his business.

'You had better see the girl's solicitor,' were his final words, 'if the parents are employing one, and find out what her intentions are. I will leave the case till the last, to give every opportunity for the collection of evidence. You understand that unless I consider it practically complete, I shall have to give them a few days for getting together their witnesses.'

Mary's witnesses, however, were all collected and ready to speak for her, all, that is to say, who were available,—for the trio who would have been most valuable from their position as having known her well throughout her life were travelling about in Spain, with unsettled address,—when, after many tedious hours of waiting, the time at last came that 'Mary Copeland' was called up into the dock.

When her call came she rose instantly to her feet, but it was with steps not too steady and beating heart that she went with the policeman up the stairs which led into the police court. At the top of them she found herself in the prisoners' dock, facing the magistrate, on whose decision her fate depended, with a gaoler beside her, and the consciousness of a big crowd gazing upon her, with an audible murmur which was peremptorily stopped by the order, cried

in a loud and awful voice by a sergeant of police, 'Silence!'

Mary's charge was read — that of having stolen and secreted a bracelet, the property of Miss Edith Bridger. It had been made as simple as possible, and the question of further thefts omitted, in order to facilitate despatch.

Mary uttered her 'Not guilty' in as firm a voice as she could muster; but the humiliation of her position, combined with the knowledge of the almost hopelessness of her cause, gave her every sensation of shame which can exist dissociated from actual guilt, and the stifling atmosphere of the crowded court, heavy with the odour of unwashed humanity, mingled with that of disinfectants, which had been accumulating throughout the day, made her feel suddenly faint and dizzy. She had hardly been able to touch the meal her father had brought in to her, and physical exhaustion, mingled with mental prostration, gave to her appearance and bearing an aspect the opposite of conscious innocence. Her answer to the question whether she would rather be tried at once or before a jury was so faintly given,—as the sense of what the inevitable result of the 'At once, sir,' would be came over her, bringing a wild impulse after all to catch at the last straw, the week's respite, the detectives' researches, the defence of counsel,—that her solicitor had to repeat it.

'You would rather be tried here, at once?' said the magistrate again. 'You understand the meaning of my question? You have the right, as you know, to wait until the sessions, and have your case tried before a jury.'

'Yes, sir, thank you; I understand. I would rather be tried at once.'

Mary's voice was perfectly audible now; she had recovered her self-possession, and braced herself to go through what was coming with all the strength that she could muster. She did not pray for help; had she not prayed all night, and taken nothing? No answer had been given to those passionate supplications that God would prove her innocent; the natural course of events was running on inexorably to their cruel finish. But her natural courage and force of character kept her upright and outwardly calm, for all the inner burning of her heart, and the wild throbs of anger with which she listened to the evidence that was brought against her. The colonel was the first witness; he was a good deal agitated. Vexation with himself at having been so taken in by Mary, added to his wrath against her for thus deceiving him, combined with the painfulness to a man, kind-hearted at bottom, of the task he had in hand, caused a chaos in his ill-balanced mind. And with the worry of the news he had just received from London, he was in a state of mind hardly more enviable than Mary's.

Once more the account was given of the missing coins, which had aroused suspicions as to Mary's honesty before the *dénouement* which had so decisively proved her a thief; then followed all the details of what had occurred the night the ring and bracelet disappeared, everything having been got out in order, in the colonel's court-martial of that night.

Edith next gave her evidence, and after her Mrs. Beddoes and Kate. Every bit of the story fitted in with fatal perfection to the theory that Mary had spent the time in which she had actually been engaged in lighting the fire in ransacking Miss Edith's drawers, and had gone up afterwards to her

own room and hidden the bracelet in her box, and run out later to post the ring to some destination unknown.

Is there justice in heaven?—the question put by the tempter to every child of man, at some period between the cradle and the grave, cried out in Mary's heart to-day. Then there came across her soul, not in any way as an answer, without apparent connection, yet with a strangely supporting force, the memory of One who had stood before tribunal after tribunal, listening in silence to those perversions of the truth which were to cause His condemnation to the most terrible of penalties. She thought of the crowds which had gathered round Him that day; and the hot hatred that was rising in her heart towards the crowd who were listening with keen, unsympathetic curiosity to the accusations now being brought against her, melted in a large measure away; the fierceness of her resentment against those who were taking away her reputation was for the moment stilled.

It was Mrs. Beddoes who was speaking now, and her evident reluctance to say the words which would do such injury to the girl she really loved, and still believed in, helped to soften Mary's heart. But then Kate stood up, and it gave Mary a new thrill as, after her kissing of the Bible, as solemn oath to speak the truth, she told a falsehood in her evidence.

'It had struck five just before I heard Mary go into the bedroom to light the fire, and it was half-past five by the clock on the stairs when she came out of it and went up to her own room.'

Then came the assertion that she had something in her hand, which was true, that being Malcolm's

letter. But how could Kate have given the time of day so circumstantially, when trusting to a faulty memory? The clock had struck five long before she went to light Miss Edith's fire!

Two of the other servants appeared as witnesses, though what they had to say was unimportant. The discovery of the bracelet in Mary's locked box was the evidence which proved conclusively to all who heard the story that she was a thief.

When the whole of the evidence against Mary had been given, the magistrate addressed her.

'Are there any questions you would like to ask?'

There was something Mary would have liked to say: that she had not been so long in Miss Edith's room as Kate had affirmed, but in her lack of legal experience she did not see how this could be put into the form of a question, and she did not consult Mr. Jameson, as it did not at the time occur to her how important a point this might be; she might as well have stolen the jewellery in the course of ten minutes as of half an hour.

Mr. Jameson did ask a few questions on her behalf; how Kate knew that Mary went up to her own bedroom from Miss Edith's room, and one or two others, but they led to nothing except a confirmation of the truthfulness of the witnesses' evidence.

Then the witnesses for the defence were heard. Half a dozen friends of the Turnbulls had come to speak for Mary, and very highly they spoke, but unfortunately it could only be in general terms, since, as she had always lived at home until she took service with the colonel, there had been no question of, or test put to, her honesty. Mr. Rupert

Fitzjames was the witness whose words drew most attention. He was the eldest son of old Sir Philip, and acquainted with all his father's Avonbridge tenantry. Most of his time, however, was spent in London, and he knew Mary but little personally. He spoke of the known respectability and high moral standing of the Turnbull family, and contrived to imply, as a barrister might have done, the severe punishment already incurred by Mary and those belonging to her, in the position she now occupied. In his eyes, as well as those of everyone else who had listened to the evidence for the prosecution, her conviction was inevitable, and all he could hope to do was to influence favourably the severity of her sentence.

The others spoke in the same strain. When the last of them sat down there was silence in the court for a moment; then the magistrate once more addressed Mary.

'You have heard all that has been said. There is no doubt about it—this bracelet was found in your box. How do you account for its being there? What have you to say for yourself?'

'Nothing, sir, except that I never put it there.'

'Who do you suppose did conceal it then?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Had anyone else possession of your key?'

'No, sir.'

Afterwards, Mary wished she had thought to mention that she had only locked her box up on going to her room after lighting Miss Edith's fire; but just then, in the teeth of all that listening crowd, with the sense of what was coming upon her, added to the strain of the last twenty hours' anxiety, Mary's self-possession was only sufficient

to carry her through the simple answers to his questions.

'It appears,' said the magistrate, 'that there are suspicions of your not having been strictly honest, before the disappearance of the jewellery, but I will not enter into that question, nor will I say that it is actually proved that the bracelet was stolen by you, though the evidence leads me to suppose that you did steal both that and the ring belonging to your employer's daughter. I shall deal with you for the unlawful possession of another person's property, which has been clearly proved against you. The bracelet belonging to Miss Edith Bridger was found in your box, and you are not able to give any explanation of its being there. I have listened carefully to what has been said in your favour by the friends who have been speaking for you, but the fact that you have been well brought up, and belong to a respectable family, only makes your conduct more disgraceful. If you had been an ignorant girl, who had had no advantages in learning what was right, there would have been more excuse for you.'

Mary clenched her hands. The thought of all the people who were listening to these words—Malcolm, it might be, among them, for her back was to the crowd; of the many more who would read them in the newspapers, of which the police reports were always a popular corner, maddened her. If he was not there to hear, Malcolm would read them. In that despairing moment she had no thought but that Malcolm would believe them.

Her lips trembled; her throat swelled; her control over herself was gone; angry sobs burst forth from her, the more bitter because, while she had no

power to stop them, she was aware that she was creating a sensation among the crowd that were witnessing her degradation, that her tears would be reported in the papers.

The magistrate paused for a moment for her to recover herself, then went on, not at all unkindly, for he was a humane man who, in sentencing her, acted from no motive but that of duty and justice; he would probably have sent her away with no worse than a severe reprimand, but for her morally, though not legally, proved dishonesty in regard to the coins, and the ring which she so obstinately refused to deliver up.

'I take into consideration that this is, in the eyes of the law, a first offence,' he said, 'and shall treat you more leniently than I could do if you had been convicted of dishonest conduct before. At the same time, under all the circumstances, I cannot let you off with a very light sentence. I shall give you three months' hard labour.'

Mary did not cry now. The sentence was nothing to her, in the face of the disgrace which her conviction represented. That was for life, unless the real culprit should some day be discovered; and hope was just now so completely eclipsed in her soul, that she had no anticipation that day would ever come.

She went down the stairs again, numbered among the transgressors,—a transgressor herself, she knew, against God, for her whole soul was in revolt, starting away from the yoke beneath which she was bidden to bend her neck.

Mary's case was the last to be tried that day. The magistrate rose; the crowd poured out into the street, and the friends of the prisoners pressed round them to say good-bye before the prison van carried them away.

There was not much time for Mary's last words; the van was waiting, and it was only through the good-nature of the officials that she was allowed a few minutes to wish her father good-bye. The poor man had broken down utterly, and Mary, the consoler and counsellor, the strong, wise woman on whom he had always leant, had now nothing to give him of comfort or invigoration. She could only stand, biting her lip and digging her nails into her hands, in fear that she too would break down. As for the other friends, she hardly saw them. She could not find a word to utter to Mrs. Beddoes, who kissed her with the tears rolling down her cheeks, telling her how it had gone to her heart to speak against her in the court.

'Now you must come along; time is up,' said the gaoler who had stood with Mary in the dock.

'Yes, we mustn't keep Black Maria waiting!' cried the old woman, as jovial as ever, though she had just received a six months' sentence. 'Come along, my dear; it ain't the first time as I've had a ride in one of Her Majesty's carriages.'

The woman accused of manslaughter was also ready. She had been committed for trial at the next assizes, and there were two men prisoners, who had of course been apart from the women in the cells.

'Haven't you a message to send home?' asked Turnbull, positively sobbing. 'Oh, Polly! I wish you hadn't set your heart on having it got through so sudden; that you'd have had the chance of being heard at the sessions, and we'd have had you home between, at least. There's your poor mother expecting you back to tea!'

Mary's lip quivered.

'Give them all my love,' she said, in an unsteady voice. 'It would have been worse for mother if I'd

come home; all the suspense, and then just the same in the end. You know what she is. And it would have been worse for me too, to see her so: tell her that. I couldn't have gone home either, to meet people, with half of them thinking that I'd done it. And then, there'd have been the trial all over again,' with a shudder, 'and lots more people that knew me in the court; to-day they would be mostly strangers. It couldn't have ended any other way than it has, and I might have got a longer sentence from the Recorder. Tell mother that too; don't let her think there is anything else that could have been done.'

Mary was more herself again, as the old flow of love and consideration for those at home broke out.

'And tell the boys they can sow what they like in the flower beds; let them each have one; Bobby'll be so pleased if he has a bit to himself. I'd ordered the seeds; they were going to send them when the fresh set came in. Jock had better have the yellow sweet-peas; he will take more pains with them; they're a new sort, and they were expensive. There's money enough to pay for the seeds,' she went on, taking out her purse and giving it to Turnbull. 'And there will be a few shillings over. I want you to get mother a pretty cap with blue ribbons for her birthday. Don't forget, they must be blue; she looks so pretty in blue, with her white hair. Mrs. Love had better choose it. I wish I'd thought before, I would have written mother a little note for you to give her with it, but it's too late now.'

'And Malcolm?'

Mary's face changed. A spasm went across it.

'Tell him everything's at an end between us now. Be sure you tell him that, father. Be sure! Don't

wait for him to say it. I wouldn't marry him if he wanted to marry me, unless I was proved innocent.'

A woman, whom she guessed correctly to be one of the female warders from the prison, now put her hand on Mary's arm.

'We can't wait any longer, my girl,' she said, decidedly, though not roughly. Mary gave her father a last kiss and went up the stairs in custody. Two minutes later she was in the place assigned to her in the van, which was divided off into partitions, a male and female warder going in it, in charge respectively of the men and women prisoners.

Mary remembered the mysterious horror inspired in childhood by the sight of the black, covered-in van, driven by a policeman, whenever she had met it on its way to or from the prison, and her speculations about the people buried alive inside. How little idea she had ever had, that some day she would know what the interior of that dreary conveyance was like by experience!

Mary's place was next the door. A policeman stood on the step in front of it, but she could see past him, and through the bars, across the opening into the street. And there, coming down it, walking at a brisk pace, with a more cheerful look than ever on his face, a look it had worn for the last two days, was Malcolm!

He was within a few paces of the van as it started, and looked up at it. His eyes caught Mary's, and he stood still suddenly, as though he had been shot. The colour left his face, and an expression of blank horror came into it. The van turned round a corner.

'Sit back,' said the warder; and Mary needed no second bidding to draw back as far as it was possible into her corner.

For a moment Malcolm gazed after the van in bewilderment; the next he felt that he must have been mistaken. He had come across one of those extraordinary likenesses that occasionally give one a shock. As for the sailor hat, that looked so like Mary's, every girl now wore a sailor hat.

'Do you know who . . . who is being taken to prison?' he asked one of the policemen standing by. Convinced as he was that this could not be Mary, the extraordinary likeness to her of the occupant of the van had so startled as to unnerve him.

'Do you mean that young woman in the corner? It is a servant girl that has been convicted of stealing jewellery—having unlawful possession of it, that is to say. Mary Copeland is her name, ain't it, Bill?'

'Convicted!'

'Yes. It's all been got through right off, because her employer—that's Colonel Bridger—wanted to be off to London to-night; they'd got all the evidence that was needed to prove what she'd done, so there was no call for a remand. The magistrate has given her three months' hard.'

What Malcolm's feelings were then it would be difficult to describe. In fact, so terrible and so sudden was the shock that he was hardly conscious of any feeling at all. Just at this moment the office boy from the Bank came running up to him.

'I beg your pardon, sir, I'm very sorry, but this note was left for you this morning while you were out at lunch, and . . .'

Malcolm did not wait to listen to the explanation of the exciting news from the boy's home, which had reached him just after that note had been left, and, as he expressed it, 'drove everything clean out of his

head.' He was reading the note, the note that told him of Mary's trouble, and begged him to go to her . . . which he had received too late! So terrible was the blow, that he positively had no thought of the careless boy who had been to blame, of anything else but Mary.

Malcolm was a man of action. He called instantly to a fly which happened to be passing.

'Drive me to the prison,' he said, 'as fast as your horse will take us.'

'There's no use your going up to the gaol,' said the policeman who had given the answer to his questions. 'You won't be allowed to see her. The prisoners have said good-bye to all their friends, and the van would be inside before you got to the prison. It's a pity you weren't here five minutes sooner.'

'Her father has just been took into that house up there, at the corner,' volunteered the policeman who had been addressed as Bill, indicating Pernambuco Lodge. 'He's got friends there, I believe, and he broke down so, poor old man, that they thought he'd better go in there and get a glass of water or something before he goes home.'

Malcolm made his way up the street with rapid strides, and knocked so loudly at the door of Pernambuco Lodge that it was opened instantly by a girl with a frightened face.

'What does all this mean?' cried Malcolm, as he was face to face with Turnbull. 'How could you let her go off to prison without my seeing her? I never got your note, but why didn't you come again?'

His face and voice were so desperate that Turnbull checked his own grief to try and console him.

'There's nothing you could have done—that anyone could have done. Mr. Fitzjames spoke up for her, and so did Wright and Meadows, and Mrs. Porteous, who's known her since she was a baby. I did mean to go round to the Bank, though of course I thought you'd got my note; but it seemed as if my head quite went, with so little time, and people to be got from such distances. But there was nothing you could have done,' he repeated, 'and I don't know that they would have let you down into the cells. I got leave, being her father.'

He broke down, as he tried to relate what had happened. Malcolm turned to Milly for an explanation, but she only sobbed and hid her face.

'It's too dreadful! Don't ask me to tell you about it!' she blurted out.

'You're better now, Mr. Turnbull, aren't you?' said Mrs. Beddoes, addressing the farmer. 'If Mr. Stewart will drive you home, you'll be able to break it gently to your wife. Perhaps you'd better not wait now, or the news will get to her before you do.'

'Tell me what it means,' said Malcolm, drawing her aside, for he saw that the old man's nerves were too unstrung for him to give a connected story, and that to get one out of Milly was equally hopeless. So Mrs. Beddoes told him the whole.

'I can't think for the life of me who did it,' she said at the end. 'For there isn't one of us but was fond of Mary. She wasn't a girl who would make enemies. I've wondered if she could have done it in her sleep; but then she wouldn't be lying down to sleep in the middle of the day.'

'It's very certain that someone put the bracelet into her box. It is a thing Mary would not have

done in her sleep—not if she was delirious with fever, and I shall leave no stone unturned till I find out who that person was.'

Malcolm's voice, quite calm now, but with a terrible determination in it, smote on Milly's ears, making her tremble and turn cold.

'How will you ever find out?' asked Turnbull feebly, yet beginning already to feel a touch of consolation.

'I don't know how, but, God helping me, I shall do it! The main line to go upon seems to be to discover the whereabouts of the ring. I shall not rest day nor night till I have proved Mary innocent, and brought to light the real culprit.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST DAY IN GAOL

THE prison van rolled up the hill, drawn by its two stout horses, and stopped in front of the locked door of the dreary pile of buildings into whose precincts none from the outer world might enter.

Mary, who until this had remained shrunk back as far as possible into her corner, lest any other eye should see and recognise her, now leant forward a little, to catch her last glimpse of the world outside, with its stir of busy, healthy life; of people in ordinary dress going about their ordinary errands, laughing and talking to each other as they went; of the branches of a budding lilac, clothed in their first fresh green, lit up by the evening sunlight of what had been throughout a brilliant day.

As all this disappeared from view, and, the door having opened with the harsh sound of a key turning in a heavy lock, the van clattered in beneath a tall archway into a paved courtyard, the force of the punishment itself, till now drowned in the greater misery of its disgrace, came over Mary. To be shut in here for three months, the three loveliest months in the year, working out her sentence inside a locked cell, while the trees were bursting into

leaf, and the hedges grew white with may, and the air was sweet with the delicious breath of spring! And all this time she would hear not one word from home, would be able to speak or send no word to them, while who knew what cruelty might not be inflicted upon her, where there would be no appeal from her taskmasters, where all was done in such secrecy that without especial license no information might be given by any of the officials of what went on inside?

Mary cast from her the momentary sensation of terror that seized upon her as the great door closed, and was locked once more behind the van, and the prisoners received their orders to alight. In its place rose up, hotter than ever, her indignation at the unjust punishment which had fallen on her, at being given common lot with the miserable creatures who descended from the van with her; that man, low-browed, with vicious face and cunning eyes; the dreadful old Mrs. Johnson, whom the warders had had hard work to keep in order during the drive.

It burnt hotly through all the preliminaries now entered upon, each of which was to Mary painful and humiliating, beginning with her reception by the gaol officials, when her name and sentence were called over to her, and the unjust charge upon which she had been condemned was taken from the constable, and the filling in of a card with her description, in which were enumerated the colour of her eyes and hair, the shape of her face, and every other detail of her appearance, including the fairness of her complexion. She was asked what her religion was, and if she could read and write, and her education was put down as 'Superior.'

Everything else that could be needed to identify her,

should she attempt to escape from prison, or to come up for a second conviction under a feigned name, was set down in this record, and room was left for the punishments she would receive for bad conduct in the gaol, the misdoings that would lead to them, and their nature when administered.

In the presence of a female warder she had to undress, take a bath, be weighed, and put on her prison clothes.

This warder was the person who would cut off her hair, thought Mary, and the thought roused in her a spirit of resentment, not soothed by Miss Pearson's manner, which was peculiarly harsh and peremptory. Miss Pearson was not a bad woman, or by nature an unkind one, but the long strain of a prison warder's life, such as only those who have had charge of female criminals can understand, had told upon her nerves and destroyed her temper. Long contact with the lowest and most depraved of her sex, moreover, combined with a position of authority over them, had produced in her the hardness which must result, except to those — a large proportion of our women officers, to their honour be it said—in whom this contact works a divine quality of compassion towards their unhappy sisters and an unwearying endeavour to help them.

'Make haste and undress,' said Miss Pearson sharply, before Mary had had time to show any disposition to dawdle. Her look and the tone of her voice, which had as a rule the result of at once quelling a prisoner, produced the opposite effect on Mary. It roused in her a spirit of opposition, a wild, extraordinary impulse to rebel openly and actively against her fate, to refuse obedience to her gaoler's commands, to match her own physical

Lancelot Speed

innocent pride, and gave herself the bath so little needed from the point of view of cleanliness, and put on the coarse, unbleached calico garments, each marked with a broad arrow, which had been worn by a dozen prisoners before her. Although the clothes had been washed, this thought gave Mary a shudder, while her fear that the old brown serge gown would not have gone through that process since its last wearing made her feel sick as she took it up.

'Wait a minute,' said Miss Pearson; 'before you put on any more of your clothes, let your hair down.'

The moment had come! Mary had read once that the cutting off of her hair was the thing felt most by a woman throughout her prison sentence. She had wondered over that at the time; she did not wonder now. As she stood with her long hair hanging round her as a cloak, and waited for the feeling of the cold scissors against her neck, she could even understand the case of the nervous girl who was delirious for thirty-six hours after her locks had been shorn. She was not quite so foolish as that; yet she set her lips tight, and as she felt Miss Pearson's fingers on it, gave an involuntary start.

'Is it all your own?' Several tugs about her head showed Mary the truthfulness of her answer was not to be taken for granted. It required a moral effort to answer, 'Yes.'

'You can do it up again as small as it will go,' said Miss Pearson, having assured herself that there were no false locks.

'Don't prisoners have their hair cut off?'

'Not unless it is dirty,'—she did not think it worth while to add, 'and only then with the doctor's orders.'

'Yours doesn't seem to be dirty. You are not expected to ask questions here; you have just to do what you are told.'

The knowledge that she was to keep her hair gave Mary some comfort, to carry her through the next process of being weighed and carefully examined by Miss Pearson for any marks or blemishes by which she might be identified, in case in the future she were to attempt to evade the police while carrying on the career of crime upon which she was supposed to have entered. The scar she had on her neck from a burn received as a child was accurately measured, and its dimensions taken down. It went in the description of her written out by Miss Pearson, which told that she had two moles on her right arm.

This done, Mary was bidden to put on her remaining underclothes, her dress, a blue cotton apron, and a cap tied under the chin that not even Malcolm could have thought becoming, which completed her gaol costume. The scarlet star which was fastened to each of her sleeves she took to mean that her sentence was one of hard labour, though in reality they only distinguished her as a 'first offender.' She was finally decorated with a yellow badge bearing a letter and figure denoting the position of the cell she was to occupy, and below this the number 13, by which she would be now known and addressed. Even her name was taken from her, with everything she had called her own. She was not Mary Copeland now; she was only a number.

The last process before she went to her cell was her inspection by the doctor, who put her through a short medical examination, to see if she were fit for the work which would naturally be given her under her sentence.

'Not much the matter with you,' he said, accustomed to hearing trumped-up pleas of ill-health from those who had any hope of being declared unequal to be tasked, and having no reason to suppose that Mary would not prove a malingerer.

'There is nothing at all the matter with me, sir; I am perfectly well,' replied Mary, her dignity set on end by his brusque laugh.

'You are not called on to speak unless you are asked a question,' said Miss Pearson. Then Mary was taken off to her own cell.

It proved to be a bare, whitewashed room, with an opaque glass window that would not open, high up in the wall, and barred on the outside, and an asphalte floor. The furniture consisted of a board which turned down and formed a bedstead, for which there were a mattress, a rug, two blankets, and a pair of sheets, now rolled up; a small deal table and a deal seat without a back. There were also washing and cleaning utensils, a plate, a tin pint, a salt-cellar, and a wooden spoon. Against the wall hung a slate, a list of prison regulations, and a set of cards with prayers, hymns, and a portion of the Catechism on them. Mary was shown the button in the wall which she could turn down, should she require one of the officers, while warned very sternly on no account to ring without necessity; and informed that the gas which Miss Pearson now lit would be put out at eight, by which hour she must be in bed. Then, with an injunction not to meddle with the light or injure any of the contents of the cell, the officer left Mary to herself, locking the door behind her as she went out.

Mary stood still in the middle of the floor, her eyes resting on first one item and then another of her

dreary surroundings, feebly shown by the light from the small jet of gas, with a sense of everything having come to an end. Life could never be what it had been before, only yesterday.

Was it really only yesterday? It seemed impossible that it was scarcely more than twenty-four hours ago that she had gone up to her room at Rochester House, so elated and happy, with the mark of her employers' favour in her thoughts, with Malcolm's letter in her hands. She never would have a situation like that again, never anything better than the hard places in a tradesman's family which women were only too thankful to get, after incurring the prison stain. She would never be Malcolm's wife. That was the message she had sent him herself. Much better that the breaking off of the engagement should come from her at once, than have him trying, or at least wishing, to get out of it. But . . . but . . . had it been quite fair on him to decide, without hearing the explanation of his non-appearance, that his love had not stood the test of her disgrace? Had it been quite sensible, apart from the want of faith it showed, to despair of the truth being made clear? Had not her pride and self-will overbalanced her usual healthy, straightforward view of things? Could she have taken everything with the meekness of wisdom, would not her whole conduct have been different through the fiery trial which had come upon and found her —fail?

Yes, she had failed utterly under it; that was the bitterest portion of Mary's misery. The recollection of her tears and loss of self-control in the court humiliated her more than the coarse clothes marked with the broad arrow she wore and the badge that was fastened to her gown. How utterly unheroic

had been her conduct from first to last, how different from what she would have pictured it to herself, if she had known beforehand that this ordeal was coming on her! Mary had always been prepared for trials as a necessary part of her Christian life. She had looked forward to them as a soldier might to battle, bravely and firmly, and had never believed but that when they did come she should meet them in a way worthy of a follower of Christ.

But there had been nothing noble, nothing edifying, in the way she had met the trial when it came. What a contrast were her words to her father, her bearing in the court, the whole attitude of her mind, from the time she was first accused, to those of any heroine in fact or fiction of whom she had ever read—from what Miss Fitzjames's would have been under the same circumstances, from what Mr. Vincent would have expected of her, from what she would have expected of herself!

Long ago Mary had heard and laid to heart a piece of sound advice; in thinking over past conduct, not to look out for, or dwell upon, the points in which one had done right, which could be left to themselves, but to search for the points where one had been wrong, since these would require altering on future occasions. The maxim had been a worldly-wise one, but it fitted in well with Christian teaching, and to seek out her weak, and not her strong, points had become a habit with her. So now it was not of what she had displayed of fortitude and patience under such exceptionally trying circumstances, or of the instinct of unselfishness which had determined her to allow her father to be at no expense for her benefit, which occupied her thoughts. She saw the element of self-will that had come in, as she clung to

her purpose to be tried at once, in spite of Turnbull's persuasions; and that was the side of her conduct on which she dwelt. She did not console herself with the recollection of how she had been enabled to keep silence when bitter words rushed to her lips, but remembered sadly how rebellious a spirit she had had within. Thus the experience which would have injured her character if she had gone through her trouble thinking of herself as a heroine did it inestimable good, refining and purifying it, as suffering alone can do.

But the burning process was not a painless one. The fire ate into Mary's soul, as it went into the furnace stripped of all proof armour of self-esteem, consuming the dross, at cost of no small suffering.

Every stage of the beginning of Mary's life in gaol seemed formed to reveal to her some weakness where she had imagined that she was strong, and to plunge her deeper into the Valley of Humiliation. For a few minutes she stood vaguely reading some of the clauses in the Card of Regulations against the wall. Then she sat down on the hard stool, and laid her head on her hands and cried.

In vain she asked where was her fortitude? She had not any, and the thought of that made her cry the more. Suddenly her tears were stopped, and the new defiant spirit awoke in her by the sound of a key grating in the keyhole.

She rose to her feet, as instinct told her she ought to, as the door opened and a woman in the black uniform of a prison matron came in; but there was nothing submissive in her attitude. To Mary everyone within these four walls—these women no more innocent than herself, and to whose iron rule she was forced to render an absolute obedience—seemed an enemy, though at

another time she would have been immediately drawn to the woman with the firm mouth and chin and grave expression, but kind grey eyes, who stood before her, and addressed her in a tone that exactly corresponded with her countenance, so far removed was it alike from one of harshness or weakness.

'Crying?' she said. 'There's no use in doing that, my girl. Here is your supper,' as she took from the hands of someone outside a tin of gruel. 'I have brought you some books too,' and she gave Mary a Bible, Prayer-book, and hymn-book, also a magazine for Sunday reading, which last would have, she said, to last her a month.

'After the first month, if you behave well,' went on the matron, 'you will be raised to the second stage, when you will be allowed more books, and will have some other privileges. The first month in gaol is always the hardest,' she went on, with a compassionate accent, as she looked into Mary's face, realising well enough what to a girl like this the experience of being in prison must be; 'but when you get through that, and into the second class, you feel you have got a step on, and after about four weeks your marks will begin to tell.'

Mary still stood, silent and irresponsive. She had said, 'Thank you, ma'am,' in a mechanical manner as she took the gruel and the books, but she had not a word more to say.

The matron proceeded to explain the system of marks. A woman could earn six, seven, or eight in a day, according to her industry. The first two hundred and twenty-four she gained counted for nothing, but after that they began to be paid for at the rate of a penny for twenty, so that by the end of three months Mary's earnings might amount to half a crown.

'That doesn't sound very much, I daresay,' added the matron, for though she had not heard Mary's voice sufficiently to be sure of her standing, her whole appearance betokened one in a different station of life from that of the ordinary gaol-bird. 'But it will be something for you to try for, to get the full number of your marks. That will be a little ambition for you.'

It showed the matron's judgment of character that she had hit so quickly on the element in Mary to which an appeal might best be made. But as yet Mary's heart was too sore, her spirit too crushed down, for her to realise any impetus from the 'ambition' held out to her. She made no answer, and the matron went on—

'At a quarter to eight a bell will ring. You will then make your bed, undress, and get into it.'

'I have to sleep on the board without the mattress, haven't I?' said Mary, who had been reading the rules for prisoners sentenced to hard labour, which included the sleeping on a plank bed for the first month.

'No,' replied the matron. 'That rule applies only to able-bodied men—as you would have seen,' she added, following the direction of Mary's eyes, 'if you had read to the bottom of your card. Boys, men over sixty, and women have the mattress to sleep on from the first. At six o'clock,' she went on, 'in the morning you will hear a bell, and you must get up immediately. Directly you are dressed you must make your bed and put your cell tidy; the floor has to be washed every morning. By half-past six you must be ready to begin work.'

'Yes, ma'am.'

Those were the only words that Mary spoke, though

it made her more miserable than ever, as the door closed behind the matron who had meant so kindly by her, to feel how thankless and irresponsive she had shown herself—she who always was so genial, and whose pleasant manner used to make everyone her friend.

At a quarter to eight the bell rang, and Mary, according to the directions she had received, let down her board and spread her mattress and bedclothes on it. She knelt down to say her prayers, but they, too, came hard and mechanical.

She did not put the feeling into words, but there it was, chilling her heart, that since God had allowed her to be condemned guilty, there was nothing more for which she even wished to asked Him, and when she came to the usual petitions for those she loved, the mention of their names brought forth fresh floods of sorrow.

Mary lay for a long time awake after the gas was put out; the prison bed, which is almost luxurious to some of the poor creatures who know no such a thing as a clean and decent resting-place till they come to gaol, felt to Mary, accustomed all her life to a very comfortable bed, most hard and ascetic, and the state of her mind was not conducive to slumber.

After she knew not how long, she fell into an uneasy sleep, from which she was suddenly woke by the sound of a piercing scream. The scream was repeated, and Mary leapt out of bed and ran mechanically to the door. It was locked, of course, and the feeling that she could do nothing, that she could not even find out the cause of the agonised cries, came over her with a sense of horror.

She was still standing, barefoot and trembling, before the door, when a step was heard in the passage; the

lock turned on the key, a light flashed in, and she was confronted by the stern face of Miss Pearson.

'Was it you who made that noise, Thirteen?' she asked, in an appalling voice. 'I thought by the look in your face this afternoon you were going to give us trouble.'

'It was not I.'

'Of course you will deny it. But I believe it was you, and I have come to tell you that if you dare do anything of the sort again, making a disturbance like this, to wake up the whole corridor, I shall report you, and you will be severely punished! Get back into bed again, and remember what I have said to you. This is an old trick, and I am not going to have it here.'

Mary went back to bed, still trembling, and lay there, with teeth chattering, in momentary expectation of hearing the scream renewed, and seeing Miss Pearson reappear to inflict on her the 'severe punishment' of which she had spoken. With the recollection of what she had heard the old woman in the police cell relate of her experience at Millbank, Mary imagined herself condemned to spend weeks in a cell, shut out from the light of day, with handcuffs on her wrists, cut off from every sort of occupation, and with no food but bread and water; or, worse still, reduced to helplessness by the application of the strait-waistcoat, so that she would have to be fed with a spoon.

The fact that she would have done nothing to merit such discipline, which was never administered even in the old days, except to the utterly refractory, went for nothing with her; since she was thus imprisoned because of another's guilt, the misconduct of a fellow-prisoner might just as well be fastened upon her.

As she lay there, trembling and unhinged, she, who had never known before what terror meant, Mary thought of how she had laughed at her mother's nervous fears, tenderly, indeed, but hardly with sympathy; it had always seemed to her so silly to be afraid of nothing, that is to say, of the 'things that *might possibly* happen!'

Nothing more happened that night. Absolute stillness reigned till, about dawn, there was a pattering of raindrops on the roof; the glory of last night was to be followed, as is so often the case, by a wet day.

When the great bell clanged out at six, Mary's first day in prison began. She was dressed, and had her cell in order by the appointed time, her brief impulse of disobedience being gone. At 6.30 she left her cell, in charge of Miss Pearson, to begin her 'hard labour.' She had supposed from Mrs. Johnson's reminiscences that this would be coir-picking, but it proved to be scrubbing, the cleaning of the floor of the corridor on to which her own cell opened. This corridor ran round the wing of the building which formed the female division of the gaol; the prisoners' cells, all exactly alike, opened on to it, with a female officer's room in the middle of the row on each side. Below this, reached by an iron staircase, was another corridor precisely similar to the first, and a second staircase led down to the ground.

There was a notice up in large letters:—

SILENCE TO BE STRICTLY OBSERVED.

It was a dreary-looking interior, lighted only by sky-lights at the top; so giving no glimpse of the outer world.

Mary had just finished the work assigned to her

by 7.30, when she was taken back to her cell for breakfast, of which meal she was feeling decidedly in need. A warder soon appeared with one of the prisoners, whose duty it was to carry round the tray. Mary was given a tin pannikin containing the amount of gruel allowed to her, and a little loaf of brown bread of the regulation size. Mary had never liked oatmeal, even in the form it took at the farm of porridge with plenty of rich new milk, and the unbuttered bread tasted very dry. But she was hungry enough not only to eat what was given her, but to feel she would have been glad of more of both the untempting viands.

At a quarter-past eight the prisoners were all mustered and conducted to the chapel, where service began at half-past eight. The men sat in the body of the church, out of sight of the women, who occupied the gallery. Mary, with two other girls, who were of the star class, was placed apart from the older offenders, but she felt that Miss Pearson's eye was perpetually upon her, and this and the proximity of her fellow-prisoners, who still produced in her an aversion that was almost terror, entirely distracted her attention from the service.

It lasted about half an hour, and at 9.15 labour began again. Mary was now taken down to the ground floor, and made over to Miss Saunders, the officer in charge of the laundry, who placed her in a cell, with directions to wash a certain number of soiled clothes, which she was told would be her morning's task. Miss Saunders locked the door of the cell as she left her.

For some minutes Mary stood idle. She who had never known what it was to shrink from work, or do what had to be done in a perfunctory, half-

hearted manner, found her task so repugnant to her that it was only with an effort, founded on the necessity for obedience, that she took it in hand at all.

She hated to touch those dirty clothes, not merely because they happened to be exceptionally dirty, being in fact the garments worn by Mrs. Johnson when she was brought in, but because they belonged to a fellow-prisoner. The whole time she was in gaol it would be her duty to cleanse her fellow-prisoners' clothes. The work was not useless and unnecessary, and there was nothing degrading in it; yet Mary felt that it degraded her. She hated it, and put so little heart into her employment that when a quarter to twelve came, and she was taken back to her cell, she was ashamed to see how little she had accomplished.

The officer in charge of the laundry was patient, and she did not expect a high standard of industry or excellence from the mostly unwilling workers it was her duty to superintend.

'You must try and get through a little more, this afternoon, Thirteen,' was all she said. The fact that she gave no sharp reproof, where Mary felt that she merited one, in itself had a humbling effect.

'I should not have let Lizzie off without a scolding,' she said to herself.

About twelve o'clock dinner was served round in the cells. Mary, being set to work in the laundry, was put on No. 3 diet, a great improvement on the No. 1 she would otherwise have begun with, but to her the dinner did not seem very satisfying.

It consisted of soup and potatoes. After that there was a time of rest, during which the prisoners were able to sit still and read. Mary's magazine,

however, was one with which she was already familiar, and in her sick state of soul she felt no inclination for opening the Bible or Prayer-book. The dirty thumb-marks she had discovered in the former, when, from a sense of duty, she had read through a chapter that morning, had disgusted her with the volume, as, at this stage, everything did which reminded her that she was made one with the lowest and basest of the people. Her fastidiousness was foolish, as Mary knew very well, but her good sense, with all her other good qualities,—the good qualities she had supposed she possessed, as Mary said to herself with an inward sob,—had crumbled away with the stroke of the rod that had fallen upon her.

At 1.30 labour began again, and continued till five, when she was finally conducted back to her cell. Mary had never supposed she would mind hardships, or that she cared what she ate and drank, but when, after her three hours and a half over the wash-tub, and half an hour of thirsty waiting for the last meal of the day, instead of the cup of tea for which the whole afternoon she had been longing there came another portion of gruel, Mary could almost have cried.

'Just like a greedy child!' she said to herself; but the result upon her throat of this reflection was not that of making it easier to swallow the dry bread which the gruel was to wash down.

Nothing else for breakfast or tea for three months! A hundred and eighty-four meals of bread and gruel! It was the thought that this day was to be repeated ninety-one times that made its misery so unsupportable. Mary's first calculation suggested further ones. She took down her slate from the wall and made

a multiplication sum ; six hours' washing a day multiplied by eighty—she supposed the prisoners did not work on Sundays—that made five hundred and forty. Five hundred and forty hours over the wash-tub ; and there would be eighty hours of scrubbing !

Then, at the end, when she came out, she would be homeless,—for she would never go back to the farm, to be a disgrace to them as well as a burden upon them, —and with no prospect of employment except what hope there might be of procuring some poor, hard place through the agency of a philanthropic society !

Mary pictured herself going into a household into which she would be received as a charity, a 'poor woman who wanted to retrieve her character,' and where suspicious eyes would be constantly watching her conduct.

It was foolish, and it was faithless thus to look forward, as she knew very well ; but she had only enough spiritual force to see that she was doing wrong and be crushed down with the consciousness of her failure, not enough to battle with her temptation and crush it under foot.

That was her bitterest experience ; yet one which, by what it taught her of deep humility and tender, wide-reaching sympathy, Mary knew to have been a blessing in the day when she came to thank God for having laid her so low.

Just as she had finished cleaning her pan after supper, the door of Mary's cell was unlocked, and Miss Pearson came in with the chaplain of the gaol. He generally paid his visits to the prisoners in the morning, but had not been well enough to make his usual round earlier to-day, and Miss Pearson, who did not like irregularity in the day's routine, was not looking her sweetest.

Mr. Harrison was an old gentleman who had been a gaol chaplain for many years, and had grown somewhat discouraged over his uphill work. His manner was not exhilarating.

'This is one of the new prisoners, is it not?' he was saying as he entered. 'In for drunkenness and disorderly conduct, I think you told me,' as he turned his eyes on Mary. In her over-strung state this was too much for her.

'No, sir. They never said *that* about me!' she replied for herself, emphatically.

'You are not to speak so to the chaplain,' Miss Pearson said, in a way that made Mary's cheek blaze more hotly. 'That was No. Fifteen,' she explained. 'This,' turning over the card with Mary's number, which hung against the wall, to the side which told her name and alleged crime, 'Thirteen is in for dishonesty.'

'You belong to the star class, I see,' said Mr. Harrison, addressing Mary. 'This is the first time you have been in prison?'

'Answer when you are spoken to, Thirteen,' said Miss Pearson.

'Yes, sir.'

'You are in for three months,' he went on. 'You will have time to think over what you have done; to think, I trust, very seriously, and to lay it to heart. It is easier to repent when we are in the early stages of sin, when we have fallen for the first time, than in after years, in which we have grown hardened in guilt. I trust that this punishment which has fallen upon you will prove a warning'—

Whether he was intending to say anything more Mary did not know, or in fact stop to question.

'I think it will be an encouragement to the person who really took the things they said I stole!' she answered vehemently, the bitterness that had been growing in her spirit, through the enforced silence of the last twenty-four hours, breaking out into words; 'seeing that they can do the wrong thing without ever being found out, and another person suffer for it.'

'No impertinence, Thirteen!' said Miss Pearson, in a tone that made Mary think again about dark cells and strait-waistcoats.

'I am sorry to see you in such a frame of mind,' said Mr. Harrison resignedly. He was too much accustomed to hearing the guilty protest their innocence to be surprised. 'There is no use my speaking to you, if this is the spirit in which you receive my words. When next I see you I trust that I shall find you in a more penitent frame. Remember that those who harden themselves in sin meet with the bitterest punishment in the end.' And he turned to the door.

At a quarter-past six the matron herself entered, bringing a skein of coarse wool and a set of knitting needles.

'Do you know how to knit?' she asked.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Do you think you would be able to copy this?' as she produced a sock, such as the men wore in the prison.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'You can work at your knitting every evening from a quarter to six till bedtime.'

That was all that passed between them. Long observation of human nature under the trying circumstances of prison life had made the matron

an accurate judge of character and comprehender of women's moods, and she knew that no words would help Mary just now. She must get through this stage of her misery alone, as far as human aid went.

Yet her quiet voice and her kindly, albeit serious, face did help Mary, and put a little fresh courage into her.

'I will do my knitting well,' she said to herself. And the occupation to her fingers was a comfort.

The perpetual thinking which was so new and, under the circumstances, so trying an experience to Mary, who had never had so much solitude in the course of a twelvemonth as in this first day of prison life, was less of a strain, when accompanied by work into which she could put a little interest. She had got through the ribs of her first sock when the bell rang for the light labour of the evening to close, and Mary went to bed.

There was another shriek that night, but it was not followed by a visit from Miss Pearson to Mary's cell. The real offender was discovered, and No. Thirteen's innocence, in this instance, proved.

When Malcolm drove off with Turnbull, Milly went up to her room, to remain there the rest of the evening. Her plea to Miss Sheridan to be excused coming down to supper, that she felt too ill, was true enough. She was not so totally devoid of heart as to have failed to find the scenes she had witnessed that day very painful, or to be able to contemplate without remorse the misery she had brought on an innocent woman.

'I never thought they would have had her taken

up for it!' Milly said to herself again, in the effort to still her bitterly upbraiding conscience. 'I thought they would just give her warning, and she would have to go away to find another place. I never imagined they would have her put in prison.'

But this was not all. A worse horror, to Milly's selfish nature, than the thought of the sufferings she had brought on others, was the fear that her own sin might be found out. Malcolm had said that he was determined to discover the real culprit; and how terribly resolute he had looked as he said it! If he did find out, if in any way the truth were discovered,—Milly shuddered, and went sick at the thought of what that would mean for her. What would Malcolm think of her then? What would everyone think — and most of all, Robert? What would he not feel, on finding his sister a thief? Milly knew his stern nature; she felt that he would never so much as look at her again. But that was not all not by a long, long way. Since Mary was sent to prison with hard labour for three months, for simply having possession of the bracelet, what would be her punishment who had actually stolen not only that, but the ring and the money, and had thrown the consequences of her own guilt on another?

If Mary, passing her first night in gaol, imagined that no woman in the world was so unhappy just then as she, she was mistaken. Milly's night was spent in a worse misery. There was all the difference between the experience of these two, that there is between the suffering caused by an accident to an otherwise healthy person, and the pangs of a mortal disease which has attacked the whole system. The first stage of the healing process had already begun with Mary, though she was hardly conscious of it

herself, and every hour would speed on her recovery. With Milly the disease was striking perpetually deeper and deeper, as it must do until, under the Great Surgeon's knife, the tumour should be cut away, and, with the tears of a bitter repentance, the poison within should be washed out of her soul.

In the morning Milly sent word that she could not go to her duties at Rochester House that day. She was not well enough. It seemed to her as if she would never be able to cross the threshold of that house again. As soon as the money came from the Simpsons, she would leave Exbridge. Even if her conduct did arouse suspicion, that was better than the ordeal of staying on in the place, and it was really safer for her to be at a distance.

If the ring brought as much as she expected it to, she could go abroad. There would be a good pretext for that too; it would be understood that she wished to study French, which was a valuable acquirement for a governess, when it had been learned in France.

In the afternoon Milly had a visit from Miss Ladbroke. She did not wish to see her aunt, but Miss Ladbroke was not in the habit of consulting other people's wishes, especially those of her youthful nieces, and she walked upstairs and knocked at the door of Milly's room.

Hardly waiting to be told to enter, she marched into it, seated herself on a chair, and untied the strings of her bonnet.

'Well, this is a queer affair!' were the first words.

'Queer?' repeated Milly feebly.

'Their clapping poor Mary into prison like that. I never heard of such a thing in my life! They

must all have been out of their senses. I can't imagine what her father was thinking of, in allowing her to be tried and sentenced straight off without giving a chance of finding out who the real thief was. But then he always was an old goose. If Mary said a thing should be done, done it would be, and he'd never dare raise a finger. But Mary must have gone off her head too, letting herself be sent off to gaol for nothing.'

'Don't you think she really did it?' asked Milly, in a feebler tone than ever.

'Really did it!' Miss Ladbroke turned upon her sharply. 'Mary begin to steal a bracelet! Well, Milly, I always knew you were a little fool, but I didn't know you were such a fool as that!'

Milly began to cry. Her tears were in reality tears of fright, but her aunt supposed them to be caused by genuine sorrow for her cousin's misfortune, and her unhinged state after the shock this had been to them all.

'There's no use crying about it,' she said, still rather sharply, but not unkindly. 'What you and I have got to do is to find out who the real thief was.'

Milly gasped.

'You think we can't do it, but I say we can. Two women's wits ought to be a match for one. It is a woman who did it, I'm certain of that. There is no man would have thought of doing such a cruel, mean, paltry thing! Men are ganders, and as to seeing through a brick wall, why, when there's a hole in it as large as your hat, they can't see what there is on the other side,—that's clear enough, by the colonel setting to work to prove Mary was guilty,—but they don't do despicable things like that.

Well, it's a woman,' she went on; 'and now the question is, What woman? It must have been somebody about the house, to know the ins and outs of things. Has Mary got any enemy?'

'Kate the housemaid used to be rather down upon her, and I don't think Johnson liked her much,' said Milly, sinking a step lower still, in involving new persons in suspicion.

'Then it's probably either Johnson or Kate. I daresay they were jealous of her with the colonel making her a favourite. If a woman does a real cruel thing, it is usually through jealousy.'

Milly trembled before her aunt's acumen, and the sure, rapid strides with which she was marching along what was the right path in the main, even if for a moment her steps swerved a little with the suggestion of Johnson and Kate. From these she soon returned, after a searching examination of Milly as to the characteristics and time of service with the family of the two women. Milly was not sufficiently clever—it can hardly be said unprincipled—to pour out an ingenious collection of lies in reply to her aunt's quick questions, and by the time Miss Ladbroke paused to consider, she was much nearer to the truth than anybody had come yet.

'Well, I think we shall find it out,' she said, after some moments' deliberation. 'If I was in your place, and had the opportunities that you have, I'll be bound I should ferret out the thief before the week was over. The queer part of it is Mary's box being locked and the key in her pocket; she must have locked it after the bracelet was put in. And the bracelet was in Miss Edith's room at what hour? . . . A quarter to five? Now,

if we only knew the minute that Mary went upstairs!'

'But, auntie, do you think it is really impossible that Mary took the bracelet?' said Milly in desperation. 'Why do you feel certain that she didn't?'

'Why? Because I know what Mary is. I don't believe she'd steal if she was starving; she'd be too proud for it. And where would be her motive either? Every penny that she had she sent home. People don't run the risk of penal servitude for the sake of sending money to their stepfathers.'

'But Mary wasn't given penal servitude,' said Milly faintly.

'No, but she might have been, if all could have been proved against her. People are often sent to penal servitude for stealing, unless they've altered the laws lately. It wouldn't be worth while to put oneself in the way of being locked up for five years for the sake of giving Turnbull a new coat.'

Miss Ladbroke went away, leaving Milly a prey to redoubled fears. If it once should flash on her aunt's mind that there was any possibility that she herself might be the culprit, she felt that all would be over with her.

She must leave England certainly, though the prospect of going alone, in all her inexperience, to a new country, was trying enough. 'Locked up for five years!' . . . What a terrible prospect!

Milly began to put her things into her boxes in a nervous, inefficient way. Then she remembered that to hurry off like this could hardly fail to bring suspicion upon her, and people were tracked out in foreign lands by the police. Even if she

succeeded in getting over to France, she might be discovered and brought back.

She could not move at any rate until she got the money. The thought of the money made Milly reflect with a new sensation of fright about the ring. Malcolm had said that he was going to try and trace that out; he had explained to her that he meant to put advertisements about it in the papers. What if the Simpsons should incautiously give him a clue to the truth? She must ensure against that, though to write a letter which should not raise their suspicions, and yet show them the absolute necessity for secrecy in the affair, was not an easy task, especially in her present state of mind.

The danger was so great, however, that Milly felt she must do something, and she sat down and wrote—

'DEAREST TOTO,—Please remember what I said to you in my letter that I wrote with the ring. You must not tell anybody about my having sent it to you to sell. Malcolm would be so horribly angry with me if he ever found out. Of course I never would have parted with it, even for a few weeks, if it had not been that I am in such dreadful difficulties, and if he knew I had done so he might break off our engagement. I am sure I can trust you and dear Tiny, can't I? You don't know what it would mean to me if Malcolm found out.—Your affectionate friend, MILLY LADBROKE.'

The next morning Milly expected to hear from Miss Simpson, but no letter came, nor was there anything by the afternoon post. The morning after, however, the sight of an envelope directed to her in the large, sprawling, up-and-down hand she admired so much made her heart beat, as she sat

down at the breakfast-table. She opened the letter, hoping to see some money inside, but there was nothing except a sheet of scented rose-coloured paper, with *Toto*, in blue, engraved across the corner.

'DEAR LITTLE MILLY,—What is all this about a ring? We can't understand! The letter you mention never reached us. Do you think you can have put on a wrong address? You had better inquire at the post-office about it, if it contained anything of value. We are *so* surprised and delighted to hear that you are really engaged to Mr. Stewart, but we think you were a naughty little puss to try and raise money on your engagement ring! I hope you will find out what has become of it. Perhaps the paper cover came off in the post?—Yours affectionately, TOTO.'

Then suspicions, hot and heavy, surged up in her breast. They were going to cheat her, they, her friends! They had kept for themselves the ring of which she had gained possession at such a cost! They were taking advantage of the need for secrecy she had urged upon them to defraud her, knowing that she could take no measures to recover her property, without the fear of its coming to Malcolm's ears that she had tried to sell the ring; they had absolutely stolen it from her!

The fact that she had stolen the ring herself did not make Milly feel the less aggrieved; on the contrary, if no terrible danger had hung over the possession of that ring, it would have been bad enough, but now their defrauding her of the fruit of her crime, while leaving to her the risk of its terrible consequences, filled her with helpless indignation.

And there, in this morning's *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post*, as well as in all the local papers of the county, was the advertisement, pointed out to her with satisfaction by Malcolm, about the ring set with five emeralds in the form of a cross, for which a reward of fifty pounds was offered.

'That ought to bring it in,' he said; 'and then we shall put detectives on the track. The whole thing will have to be made clear now, and the real thief exposed, so that we can get Mary's release.'

'Was the ring worth fifty pounds?' asked Milly. She felt she must say something.

'No, the value of it is forty pounds at the outside. We put on the ten pounds extra, to make sure of getting it brought to us. Mrs. Bridger was going to offer forty pounds, because the ring is an heirloom and they are anxious to get it back, and I told them I would add another ten pounds. To have Mary's innocence proved, is worth more to me than that. I was going to put a hundred pounds, but young Mr. Bridger said he thought this ought to do it; and, as he put it, that fifty pounds could be better spent than in rewarding a thief for his dishonesty. He believes her innocent, I could see it, and I think the others are beginning not to feel so sure the other way. I found it hard work keeping myself in when I was speaking to them, I can tell you,' Malcolm added. 'The colonel wasn't there, and it is as well for me that he wasn't. He was the one who actually prosecuted, and I don't think I could have helped giving him a bit of my mind.'

Rochester House was not the only place Malcolm visited in Mary's behalf. His first expedition had

been to the gaol, where, however, the porter who kept the door had told him that he could neither be admitted, nor receive any information regarding the inmates of that grim building, or of what went on inside its walls, without an order from the Home Office. Prisoners in for three months were not allowed to see visitors or receive letters, but if he wrote to the Secretary of the Prisons Commission he might get a permit to go over the gaol.

So Malcolm wrote, asking for the permit, and waited three days eagerly, in the fond hope that during the course of his inspection of the prison he might have a glimpse of Mary, and tell her the one thing he had set his mind on telling her—that her last message to him went for nothing, and that he was more truly hers and she his than ever.

Bitter was Malcolm's disappointment when the permission to visit the gaol, which was readily accorded him, proved to contain the notice not only that 'Any communication between visitors and prisoners' was 'forbidden'—he fancied that if once Mary's eyes met his, it would be possible to tell her without words what he wanted to say—but that 'Visitors were not taken to parts of the prison where they were liable to meet with prisoners of the opposite sex.'

He made use of his permit to go over the portion of the prison to which it admitted him, just for the sake of being within the same four walls as Mary, and to learn what he could about her life. What he did see and hear had not the effect of pacifying his mind, or reconciling it to the thought of what Mary was being subjected to. As he stood

in the chapel, and thought that it was there she worshipped, Malcolm came as near a breakdown as he had ever done in his life in the sight of any stranger. He wished he could have left a message on the walls. Only two words would have been enough, '*My* Mary!'

He could not leave a message, but who shall say but that what he did leave there went as direct to her heart and brought her cheer and comfort as much as the words written or spoken, or the sight of his face would have done?

'You would like to see the exercising yard? The women have to use the men's now, at different hours, of course, as theirs is being repaired, but they will be out of it in a minute,' said the warder who was taking Malcolm round. They waited the minute, till the clock had struck three and ceased. Then Malcolm was conducted to the court whose pavement was, it might almost be said, hallowed to him by the thought that only a few seconds before it had been trodden by Mary's feet.

There had been a wild, foolish fancy in his mind that he might catch a glimpse of Mary's retreating figure; but the exercise ground was as deserted as a plateau of Central Africa; and here again he could leave no message.

More distracted than ever, poor Malcolm next asked for an interview with the governor, who consented to see him, and received him courteously; but the interview afforded him little more satisfaction.

Major Begbie asked politely to know his errand, and Malcolm, always so practical, definite, and collected, found this errand he had to describe sufficiently vague. He wanted to know if there was

any hope of his being allowed to see one of the female prisoners — the words stuck in his throat as he was obliged to describe Mary thus—of whose innocence he felt assured. The governor did not smile, though Malcolm had an angry sensation that he felt inclined to. He asked for how long the woman in question was sentenced, and on hearing, shook his head.

'Are you a relation of hers?' he asked.

'Not yet,' answered Malcolm, flushing; 'but I look forward to being her nearest relation. Miss Copeland has promised to be my wife.'

Major Begbie raised his eyebrows a trifle, and became more interested.

'I am afraid you will have to wait till the end of the three months,' he said. 'In the case of a longer sentence, she would only be allowed to receive a visitor when that time had elapsed. As it is, she will be going out then. Three months is only a short time,' he added, by way of consolation.

Malcolm fired up.

'A short time, sir! It strikes me if you or I had to spend from now to the middle of July shut up in cells, doing hard labour upon starvation diet, we should not find the time so very short! And she is a woman!'

It was the time when the papers were full of the evidence brought before Parliament as to the insufficiency of prison food and the injurious effects of such short commons upon the prisoners' health, and Malcolm was as worked-up upon the subject as the most red-hot of reformers, seeing that Mary was now one of the victims.

The governor mildly combated the term 'starvation diet,' quoted instances where prisoners had gained

in weight during their term of punishment, and the remarks made by certain of them on liberation that they wished they could look forward to as good food, at as regular hours, when they were at liberty. As regarded the fact of the prisoner in question being a woman, the women's 'hard labour' was a much lighter affair than the men's.

'Women are never given the treadwheel or the crank,' he said.

Malcolm felt that, if they were, he would be found concerned in a dynamite conspiracy for blowing up the quarters of the Prisons Commission at Whitehall! In fact, his usual good sense was at a singularly low ebb, as was proved by his next entering into discussion with Major Begbie on the suitability of oatmeal as a staple of diet, proving scientifically that it was one of the articles of food least calculated for sustaining the consumer beyond a short period, to which explanation the governor listened, still courteously, but without exceptional interest, remarking at the end—

'The matter of diet, as of the labour that shall be done by the prisoners, is not left to us. These things come under the head of Prison Regulations, which we are here not to improve, but simply to carry out. I can assure you that they are carried out humanely, and with regard to the circumstances of the individual case, so far as is compatible with prison discipline. The health of the prisoners is a point always rigorously attended to, and every morning each of them is asked whether he wishes to see the governor, chaplain, or doctor, so they have the opportunity for making any grievance known, and can always receive medical advice. In case of illness they are sent to the infirmary, where

I have no hesitation in saying that they receive as much care and are made as comfortable as the patients in the County Hospital. With regard to the contact with depraved women, of which you spoke, prisoners of the star class are so carefully kept apart from the old hands in crime, that in the big London prisons, where the washing and cleaning is done by a number of women in company, a first offender is not sent to the kitchen or laundry. Even with a sentence of hard labour, she would only be given such work as she could do in her own cell. And now . . .' He looked at his watch.

Malcolm took the hint, and left with as deep a sense of defeat as Jem, Jock, and Bobby had experienced when a grand scheme they had made for forcing their way up to Mary's window and rescuing her by night had been proved futile by Jem's survey of the strong wall which encompassed the prison buildings.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

THE second day which Mary spent in prison was a facsimile of the first, except that there was Australian meat instead of soup for dinner, and that her afternoon's labour consisted of scrubbing out the kitchen premises instead of washing.

It was again a wet day. Sunday was fine, as Mary could tell when the sun came round to her window, although it admitted none of his actual rays. She awoke about dawn from a dream that she was sitting down to a Sunday breakfast at the farm, with bacon and new-laid eggs and coffee with cream in it, and all the good things that a hungry person imagines in sleep, which all disappeared with the opening of her eyes before she had had time to eat a mouthful.

Sunday was a very long day. The prisoners did not rise till seven, but as Mary had not got to sleep again since dawn, that was scarcely a boon to her. Thirteen hours of day remained, out of which about three were spent in church, and the whole of the remaining ten, for those in the first stage of their punishment, in their cells. The meals were less substantial than usual, as the prisoners not being

required to labour were supposed to require less sustenance.

It was certainly not a cheerful Sunday; yet on this day there shone in on Mary's soul the first gleams of light from behind the black cloud which was in truth only a cloud, though it had seemed to her at first that her sun had set for ever.

The services in the chapel were very different from those at Avonbridge, or at the beautiful church in Exbridge, which Mary had frequented while in service, but the singing, in which the prisoners joined heartily, made them more cheerful than the week-day ones, and Miss Pearson had ceased to fix her eyes on No. Thirteen during the service, to mark whether her demeanour might not conceal some clandestine intentions. If Mary's outspokenness had not shown Miss Pearson as clearly as it should have done that her character was not of the kind familiar enough to prison warders, which make professions of religion and repentance to curry favour with the chaplain, she did see that Mary was the kind of woman to shrink from, rather than to incline to, unlawful communications with her fellow-prisoners. As a first offender, Mary was kept as much as possible from contact with the habitual criminals, even taking exercise at different times from them, and her terror at the consciousness of belonging to their company was lessened by finding how little she really had to do with them.

She was able, therefore, to attend to the service better to-day, and as the familiar words of the Confession passed through her lips, the old praying from the heart that was wont to go with it arose again. It was accompanied with a deeper sense

of the truth of the unworthiness acknowledged in that prayer than she had ever had before. 'There is no health in us.' How utterly did that describe her state!

It was Palm Sunday; when the beautiful Collect was said, an eager longing woke in Mary's soul for strength to follow the example of that 'great humility,' that perfect 'patience' from which she had strayed so far. Every word of the Epistle sank, as rain will into ploughed ground, into her lacerated soul. If 'this mind' were in her, how differently she would be taking her prison discipline! To attain this mind was the real hard labour which she had been given to do there.

When she was locked into her cell again, Mary took the shiny-covered Bible, ashamed of the disgust that had been roused in her by the marks of other readers, nearer to God perhaps than she, and turned to the Epistle of St. Peter, in which were several passages from the list Mr. Vincent had once made his class write down of parts of the Bible likely to be helpful to them in time of trouble.

'If ye do well and suffer' . . . the *for it* Mary noticed was in italics, so did not belong to the original . . . 'this is acceptable.' In a sense she had done well, and was suffering; but how was she bearing it? Not, as the other passage of the same kind in that Epistle put it, in a thankworthy way. No man was to suffer as a thief; was she not going through her prison life very much as a real thief might have done? And Mary set herself to think how she could suffer as a Christian, in a way worthy of one who followed Christ. Thinking upon one's knees very soon leads to prayer, and prayer of this kind never fails to lead to comfort.

When Mary rose to her feet again, it was with new courage, and a determination to live the coming week on different principles from those with which she had gone through the last two days.

There was a long period after the morning service, broken only by the arrival of the potatoes and suet-pudding which formed the Sunday dinner. At 2.30 there was another service. Mary had meant to go on with her Bible reading after this, but such a bad headache had come on when she returned to her cell that she could do nothing but lay her head down on the table, and not think of anything at all.

Before very long the door opened, with the now familiar sound of the grating key, and the matron entered.

'Crying again, Thirteen?' she said in her grave, kind voice. Mary rose.

'No, ma'am, I wasn't crying this time. It was only my head ached.'

'Badly?'

'Yes, rather, ma'am. I didn't feel as if I could hold it up.'

If she could have done what she liked, the matron would have brought Mary a cup of strong tea from the teapot that she had left steaming fragrantly upon her table, and sent her out for a blow of the fresh, spring air in the exercising ground; but Mary was still in her first month, during which even the half-hour of exercise allowed on Sundays to the prisoners of a higher stage is not permitted, and no prisoner might have such a luxury as tea except by the doctor's orders. So she did the best thing that was within her power in making Mary lie down upon her bed, covering her cold feet with blankets, and fastening a cloth soaked in water round her burning

head. The gratitude of Mary's thanks touched her.

'You will be quiet here, anyhow,' she said. 'And you'll feel better by to-morrow.'

'I hope I shall *be* better to-morrow,' answered Mary. 'I am going to try—though I made a bad beginning.'

'I heard that you were impertinent to the chaplain. How was that?'

'He took it for granted that I was guilty, and that made me angry.'

'What else could you expect him to think, finding you here? There are very few innocent people who get into prison, and we are bound to take the magistrate's decision as correct.'

'Yes, I know, ma'am. It was very foolish of me. I have thought it all out to-day.'

'Well, don't think any more now. Try to go to sleep.' The matron laid a hand, as tender as a mother's might have been, on Mary's throbbing forehead.

'He made those that led them away captive to pity them,' recurred to Mary's mind, as the matron left her. And after she was left alone, she fell into a sounder sleep than she had known since the doors of the prison had closed upon her.

On Monday morning Mary rose to begin the new week in a new spirit, with the determination to do her work, as it had always been a cheering influence to her to think every bit of work might be done, to the glory of God. The scrubbing of an expanse of floor which looked so exactly the same after as before the operation that the only result from it seemed to be her own back-ache, was not an exhilarating occupation, and it was not easy to put a

pride into the washing of the piles of men's underclothes, which were not even to be ironed; but her labour was cheered the whole day long by the sense which had returned to her, with redoubled force, of the presence beside her of Him who had laboured year after year in the carpenter's shop, when with one word He could have created all that was ever made there, of Him who had carried the cross up Calvary.

'You have got through a lot this morning, Thirteen,' said the laundry officer encouragingly, as she inspected the result of Mary's work. She was a vigorous, bright-mannered young woman, not many years older than Mary, already on the high road to promotion through her successful method of dealing with her charges. In this atmosphere of depression, where the fact that all the work done was done simply as punishment, and given for the purpose of making existence disagreeable, was calculated to take the spirit out of the most industrious, she was quick to encourage every promise of the 'turning to in earnest,' which was what she knew to be the secret of effectual effort.

'You have done your work very well too,' she said. 'Were you in a laundry before you came here?'

It was on Mary's lips to tell Miss Saunders to how many young servants of her father's she had taught the whole of a laundry-maid's work, but something from yesterday's meditations held her back, and she only replied in the negative, adding—

'But I know how to wash and iron.'

'There is not much ironing to be done here; only the officers' clothes; but I shall put you on that when it comes, and see what you can do.' She smiled, and Mary smiled back. It was a sign of returning health;

there had not been one of the smiles that were usually breaking out for ever on Mary's dimpled face, since she had stood before the colonel in his study.

Just after dinner there came a pleasant surprise. Mary was summoned to do her hour in the exercising ground. The first two days of her time in prison having been wet, and the third a Sunday, this had not occurred before, and she was not aware that she would once see the blue sky or feel the fresh air blowing in her face throughout her three months in prison.

The daily exercise of the gaol was not the most cheerful kind of walk to be imagined, and to some of the prisoners it was an actual penance. The yard was enclosed in high brick walls. In the centre of the space set apart for exercise stood one of the warders, and round and round her on an asphalte path surrounding a plot of grass marched the prisoners at a given pace, marked by the beat of the officer's hand, at a regulation distance from each other, for an hour by the clock.

But to Mary the mere fact of being in the open air was joy; the sight of the sky, blue and bright, with soft white clouds skimming across it, of the budding branches of two elms outside, which were so tall that their tops appeared above the prison wall, the sound of the twittering of the sparrows, and the distant noises from the world outside, caused almost a sensation of freedom. It was with a very bright smile that she turned her face to the matron, who was to-day the regulator of the walk, and she went back to her afternoon's labour less tired than she had left off in the morning.

Mary earned eight marks that day, the outside number. She had made only six, the minimum amount, on the first day, and only seven on the second,

but she was determined that she would earn the maximum number every one of her remaining days in prison.

There was something almost comic in the thought that her seven hours' hard work was valued at something under a halfpenny, but the little ambition of gaining each day the token that she had done her best was a help to her; and, as Mr. Vincent had once said, it was well to make use of all the little helps towards growing good that one could lay hold of in life.

It would only prove to have been a spurt, so Miss Pearson prophesied of the extra quantity and quality Thirteen had accomplished that day, just to show what she could do, and after that the girl would be as lazy and tiresome as ever; but the laundry officer took a more hopeful view of the case.

'Thirteen isn't an ordinary prisoner,' she said. 'I cannot think how she ever got in here. You have only to look at her face, to see that she is not a bad woman. However,' with a laugh, 'it is a good thing for me that she has, for she will be a treasure in the laundry.'

On Tuesday, when Mary was in her cell during the midday rest, the matron came in accompanying, not the gaol chaplain, but another clergyman who was taking his place for a few days, to give Mr. Harrison the change of air which his health needed.

This was a younger man, not much older than Mr. Vincent, but there were some deep lines in his face that had been planted there by suffering. It was with a strong ring of life and hopefulness in his voice, however, that he addressed her.

'Well, my girl, and what have you done?'

The tone was the same in which a good doctor might

ask a patient whom he expected very quickly to cure, 'Well, and what is the matter with you?'

'What they said I did was to steal a ring and a bracelet and some money from my employer's daughter, sir.'

'But you did not do it?'

Mary looked straight back into his eyes, which were fixed on hers, and answered—

'No, sir.' As she did so she felt how impossible it would have been to meet that steady gaze which seemed to read her soul, and lie.

'How thankful you must be!' he said.

'It doesn't make much difference in what I'm going through, sir, does it?' she answered, rather dejectedly.

Mary was very tired to-day, and her physical condition, while she had not allowed it to affect her patience or her industry, had told upon her spirits.

'Not much difference!' he responded. 'Don't you think there was much difference between St. Paul's feeling when he was in prison and Samson's? Punishment is a splendid thing,' he went on. 'When we have done wrong, and God punishes us for it, He is giving something to us that we ought to be thankful for. But when we suffer without having done wrong, that suffering is a gift that we can make to Him. And if the gift He accepts from us is the bearing of another's punishment, is it not the greatest honour that He can grant us? That is the offering He took from His Son.'

Mary was silent, with the new thought which gave her a sense of awe, mingled with a great throb of joy. The joy clouded over quickly, however, as she remembered how completely her suffering had been forced upon her.

'But I am only enduring it because I cannot help it,

sir,' she said. 'I never chose to bear the punishment for the sake of the other person, whoever it was, that did what I was put in prison for.'

'But you can make it your choice,' he said earnestly. 'Don't you feel that you have done so already? If you knew that it was God's will that you should bear the punishment and the disgrace in the real sinner's place, would you not do it, even if by some act of your own you could escape?'

Mary was silent again, questioning herself. It was as though she had come to the foot of another great step. Was that to be this Easter's step? She must get to the top of it, she knew; but she could not feel she had climbed up it yet. She could not feel that, if the choice were put before her, 'Shall the person who stole these things bear the punishment for it, or shall you?' that she could answer, 'I.'

'It is not my choice yet, sir,' she said in a low voice. The presence of a third person made it more difficult even than would have ordinarily been the case to speak out of the depth of her soul; yet she would not deceive him by letting him imagine her so much better than she was. 'But,' in a lower voice still, 'I shall ask God to make it so.'

'He will make it so,' said Mr. Despard, with an absolute assurance that helped her half-way up her step; and when she looked up in his face again, the look that met her made her understand what was meant by the words that the face of St. Stephen was as the face of an angel.

That help came just when Mary needed it most, to steady her steps on the pathway of endurance. The reactionary mood that is apt to follow a vigorous start had come over her, threatening to cause the high ideal with which she had begun the week to dwindle down

into a getting through each day as best she could, without the definite purpose of making her life a witness to her faith.

Now, she was not only encouraged to go on as she had begun, with a fresh sense that she had an offering to make, acceptable to God, but a higher ideal yet was set before her; not merely to endure patiently, but to choose to endure.

The Holy Week services were a wonderful help, not merely because Mr. Despard gave, at the end of each, an address which put new thoughts into her mind, and brought home to her great truths as they had never been brought home before. The parts of the Bible appointed to be read on these days seemed as though they had been especially chosen for her. It was, this year, as if passages which had before lain in shade started up suddenly into the sunlight. In every chapter that she heard in church, in every page she read to herself alone, she found revealed that great principle, the beauty and the glory of sacrifice, and its necessity as a part of the Christian life.

That Good Friday, spent in prison as a Sunday, was one on which Mary was to look back with thankfulness through her whole after life. Till now, Good Friday had been to Mary a trying day. It had been always painful to her to dwell upon the sufferings of our Lord, and, though she had tried to keep the anniversary of His Passion conscientiously, it had been a relief to her to have it over, and prepare for the brightness of Easter. This Good Friday, however, the account of those sufferings came with a new force, as Mary felt herself in some dim measure able to comprehend how He who was sinless could know what it was to be made sin.

And while she dwelt upon Him with a deeper reverence and adoration, a more poignant sorrow for that in herself which had caused His sufferings, there came a new sense of rest, of healing, and of power. She began to realise that there was something to be thankful for in the misery she had gone through in her first days in prison. Whatever was before her in the after life, she would be able to say to herself, 'But it is not as bad as that.' And yet she would feel glad she had been through the experience, because of the deep sympathy it would give her with those crushed down by sorrow, and the power of saying to them, 'This, too, will pass!'

Even that strange wild impulse of lawlessness which had swept over her on her first arrival would be of value, for it gave her an understanding she could never otherwise have had of the struggles and temptations of the sinful, and the confidence to tell them, 'You, too, shall conquer!'

Mary's own thoughts found an echo in the tone of the preacher's sermon, which was on the text, 'Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.' Good Friday was endured, that there might be an Easter. Punishment was sent, that sin might be defeated and driven out. Suffering came, that it might be followed by joy. The heaviness was for a night — for one night alone —the joy was to be for ever and ever!

The next day Mr. Despard left, and the old chaplain returned. Mary had asked the matron whether she would be allowed to receive the Holy Communion on Easter Day, and the matron told

him of her wish. It was a desire so unusual, among the female prisoners especially, that Mr. Harrison was surprised. He was also somewhat troubled, as he recollected the attitude Mary had taken in asserting her innocence. It was a puzzle to him what to do, and he came to see her, with the hope that she would acknowledge herself guilty. The interview was a good test of Mary's newly-acquired humility, the more so as Miss Pearson again accompanied him, and her manner to-day was somehow more than usually trying, though she stood and listened without saying a word, after her opening injunction—

'You are to speak respectfully to the chaplain to-day, Thirteen!'

'I hear that you wish to receive the Holy Communion to-morrow,' said Mr. Harrison, in a doubtful voice. 'Have you been in the habit of doing so?'

'Yes, sir.'

'It is a very solemn service; one to which we should do very wrong to come without preparation and true penitence. . . . I was very sorry,' the chaplain went on, as Mary did not answer, 'to find you protesting your innocence so emphatically the other day. It is very common, in fact almost universal, for prisoners to deny the crimes of which they have been guilty, but as a rule there is no profession of religion made by them. Any wickedness, especially the denying of a sin, is a worse thing—at least a more serious one — in a person who is by way of making the law of God his guide, than in those who openly refuse to acknowledge Him.'

Mary was silent; she felt that a reiteration of her innocence would strengthen the chaplain in his fear that she was not in a state to be admitted to the Holy Communion.

'If you were willing,' he went on, 'to confess, at least to us, to whom you made your assertion of innocence the other day, that you are not being unjustly punished, it would give me much more confidence that I was justified in admitting you to the Holy Table.'

The kindness of his manner as he spoke, his evident desire to encourage her to retract the falsehood he supposed her to have told, gave Mary a sense of pain. But what could she say?

'I am sorry you will not do this,' the chaplain proceeded, with a change to a sterner manner, as she still remained without speaking, 'but your silence is at least better than further asseverations of innocence. Had you repeated those assertions, I could not conscientiously have allowed you to come to-morrow. I feel, however, that you have made the first step, by ceasing to deny your crime. I trust that you will make a full confession before God of what you have done amiss. Remember that He sees and knows all that is hidden from human eyes.'

'Yes, sir, I remember that.'

As Mary spoke, whether from something in her voice, which trembled a little, or something in her face, which showed two tearful eyes, or in her attitude, which was unconsciously one of utter humility, it flashed upon the chaplain's mind as it had not done on that first day, when she stood erect in pride and indignation before him, that this girl might be innocent. He had not the gift of discerning of spirits, still granted to one here and there, which Mr. Despard possessed in such large measure, but he was a good man, and had a kind heart.

'God knows everything,' he said. 'If I have judged you wrongly, remember that. But, for all of us, there is much that we have to confess before Him.'

'Yes, sir,' Mary answered, the tears that were in her eyes falling. Then the door closed behind him and Miss Pearson, and the key turned in the lock.

It was the best preparation for her Easter Communion that Mary had ever had. A deeper joy than she had ever known before came to her as she knelt beside the matron at the altar, and made the offering of herself to Him to whose great Sacrifice she felt her own was linked, tiny as that seemed, since, before the cross, her own sufferings had shrunk to their true proportion, and she had found herself to be so unworthy that it gave her a fresh revelation of His love, to know that He was willing to accept it.

And that joy was with her all through the day, as she sat or knelt in the cell which felt no longer lonely, with the sense of His presence who was with her there; for the Easter blessing does not depend on the beautiful music and the mass of white flowers, and all the glorious adjuncts of a festival service, but on the way that the lessons of Good Friday have been learnt.

She had reached the top of that second step, and from it there was a new prospect of earth and heaven, wider and grander than she had seen before.

CHAPTER XV

THE VICTORY OF LOVE

WHILE Mary in her low estate, brought down to the level of the most degraded, sharing with them in the laborious discipline and humiliations intended to punish vice, was spiritually rising with rapid flights up the way of saintliness, Milly's equally rapid fall from one depth to another of selfishness and deception was accompanied by a rise in outward prosperity, which did much to allay the misery at first caused by her remorse and fears.

None of the means taken by Malcolm and the Bridgers to gain possession of the ring were of effect. Though the reward offered for it was gradually raised till it reached the sum of one hundred pounds, no information concerning its whereabouts was brought to them.

Close as Miss Ladbroke had come to the truth, in the first instance, no subsequent efforts of hers seemed to bring her nearer to it, even after she had paid a visit to Rochester House, and cross-examined Kate in the manner she had done her niece.

'There was no one else on that floor at the time; no one at all,' Kate said, irritated by her persistence; 'except the schoolroom party, that's to say. If it wasn't Mary that took the things, then it must have been your niece!'

That Mary had taken them was as clear as daylight to Kate, and she was glad to find that she had at last satisfied this tiresome old person.

She did not see the grey look that came suddenly over Miss Ladbroke's face, for it was growing dusk, and Miss Ladbroke rose from her chair, and said good-bye, and left the house as erect as usual. But when she got out into the street she tottered, and leaned heavily against the wall. After that she ceased to pursue her investigations.

From Toto and Tiny, Milly never heard again. She restrained her first impulse to write them an angry letter, demanding the money for her ring, with the thought of how impossible it would be to prove they had ever received it. Convinced in her own mind though she was that they had appropriated it, Milly would under any other circumstances have made inquiries at the post-office about her letter; as it was, however, she was afraid to take any steps of the kind, caring much less now about the money she might have got for the ring than about keeping free from suspicion of her theft.

The worst result of not getting the money was that now she was unable to leave Exbridge; but a letter she received from her brother Robert a few days after Mary had gone to prison set her mind largely at rest in this matter.

'I expect to be in England again in a few weeks,' he said. 'Then I shall have a ship of my own, and I am going to take you a long voyage in her. If you settle down to a sea-faring life, there is no reason you should not make your home upon the ocean—as my wife would have done, if I had married; or, if you don't take to that, you might keep house for me in one of the ports I shall generally be coming into.

If you don't like teaching, you shan't go on with it, now I shall have plenty for us both. You don't know how I have missed my little sister all these years.'

Those last words were the most loving ones Milly had ever received from her brother. Robert was a reserved, and sometimes harsh-mannered man, though there was, as his sister knew, a depth of feeling under his hard exterior.

To go away to distant lands, to leave far behind her the scene of her crime, and of all these sick terrors of discovery, that prospect, coupled with the thought of having no longer to depend on her own exertions for a living, and possessing a home of her own, with the only person in the world, apart from Malcolm, for whom she really cared, was a vision of bliss.

Only one greater joy could she conceive of, and, with the strange good fortune that had come upon her, with the failure of all efforts to establish Mary's innocence, hope, even of that, sprang up once more in Milly's heart.

Malcolm never mentioned Mary's name now; perhaps he, too, was beginning to believe in her guilt; and he was kinder in his manner towards herself, gentler and more responsive than Milly had ever known him before. The truth was that Malcolm's trial, a very terrible one to him, in his helplessness to aid in the slightest degree the woman he loved heart and soul, had softened him, and rendered him more sympathetic. There had always been in him a pitiful feeling for Milly, and this grew warmer, as he saw how greatly she took to heart her cousin's trouble, and experienced the constant marks of her sympathy with him. To imagine a design in

this sympathetic attitude of hers towards him would not have been consistent with Malcolm's nature. There was in him, as has been seen, a simplicity and ignorance about the wiles of women that generally goes with breadth of character in a man.

When fresh trouble came upon him, in the news of his father's gradual sinking, it little occurred to him how, underlying Milly's tactful attitude of compassion was the thought that Malcolm would soon come into his father's money, and be able to marry whenever he pleased, and that hearts were often caught on the rebound.

He would have to go back to Canada as soon as he could wind up his business at the Bank, and should make his home there, so he told her ; and Milly's heart leapt within her as another, and even brighter, prospect than the first now danced before her eyes. Even in money matters Milly's affairs were now in a more flourishing state. Robert had enclosed in his letter a five-pound note, and, over and above this, an increase had been made in her salary, on the moving of another of the Bridger children from the nursery to the schoolroom. She was able to stop the mouths of her most pressing creditors by paying them something 'on account,' and had again some money in her pocket, for, since to clear herself off just now was impossible, she might as well have the enjoyment of some of the funds in hand.

The topic of Mary and the loss of the ring was less dwelt on now at Rochester House than it had been at first, for a fresh event, and a more tragic one, had occurred in the family. This was the sudden death of Colonel Bridger's only brother, which had occurred while he was in London.

The two brothers, both quick-tempered, high-

spirited men, had, in spite of a deep-rooted affection at bottom, not infrequently quarrelled. The last quarrel they had had over the business matters which called the colonel up to town, had been the most violent, and after a hot-blooded altercation they had parted in wrath.

Before the colonel had got his coat on to leave his brother's house—'never,' as he had said, without any genuine intention of the kind, 'to darken its doors again,'—he was called back upstairs by a servant with a long face. 'The master has fallen down in a fit.'

It was a paralytic stroke, from which Mr. Bridger never recovered consciousness. Had the patient received any shock? was the doctor's first question, as he pronounced on the nature of the malady. Any mental agitation might have brought on the paralysis. There was no hope.

Colonel Bridger returned home after the funeral, so changed, even in face, as to give his whole family a shock.

'I killed him, Anna!' he said to his wife, in an unsteady voice, as soon as he was alone with her. 'He had left me everything . . . there was more even than we thought . . . I would give every penny of my own not to have been called on to touch that money!'

It was his children's opinion that their father must have had a stroke too. He had become so aged, and the old spirit had so completely gone out of him. Harold, who was fond of adopting a cynical tone, averred that the pater was afraid of having a seizure himself some day, if he went on indulging in his old rages; but he gradually acquired a more respectful and considerate manner towards the old man, a

genuine old man now. To his wife and daughters the new gentleness of the colonel's manner was touching; the servants did not fail to notice the way he restrained himself, when the impulse came on him to storm at them in the old-fashioned way.

He had always been generous, but had taken out the value of his gifts, as the household put it, by his domineering, disagreeable manner. Now the generosity remained, and began to stand out as such, and a new spirit gradually came over the house.

'Have you heard anything about that poor girl?' the colonel asked Mrs. Beddoes, when he met her alone one day.

'Mary? No, sir. She's not allowed to receive visitors or letters, they say, being in just for three months.'

'The three months will be over on the seventh of July, will they not?'

'About that, sir.'

'Exactly that. It was on the seventh of April she was put in.' There was a touch of his former impatience. 'Let her people know that I want to see her when she comes out. I should like her to come here straight, directly she leaves the gaol, before she goes home at all.'

It was on the same day that he increased Milly's salary ten pounds a year. He had heard how much the girl had taken her cousin's disgrace to heart.

The morning after that, Milly had a second letter from her brother, telling her that Robert had reached England. He wrote from Hull, and said he had only to complete his negotiations for the purchase of a ship already prepared for sea, and engage his crew, before sailing again to the New Continent, where he would take Milly with him.

The week following came another letter, saying that the Catherine was now his own, and that he hoped to sail for Sydney in a month's time. Milly must get all her things ready, and be prepared to start at a day's notice. He should come down and fetch her, and say good-bye to them all at Avonbridge; and then farewell to Old England for them both!

A month hence. That would be a week before Mary came out, as Milly recognised, with intense relief. She had been dreading with an increasing dread the day when Mary should be at liberty,—Mary, who was not simply convinced, as Malcolm, and all her relatives, and the friends who knew her were, that someone else had taken the ring and put the bracelet in her box, but who knew for certain that it was so.

When Mary came out, strong and terrible—so her figure appeared before the guilty Milly's eyes—in her innocence, set, as she must be, on proving that it was not she who had committed the crime for which she had suffered, might not her evidence, combined with Malcolm's determination, result in an exposure of the truth? And then where, where would she be?

But this letter removed the one fear that had been torturing Milly's mind. Before Mary was free she herself would be far away from the scene of her sin, from the clutch of the English law. If any danger remained, Robert would shield her from it. She would be safe in his ship.

There was another bank-note, for ten pounds this time, enclosed in her brother's letter. She was to get herself a thorough outfit, he said; plenty of light dresses, for Sydney was very hot in summer.

It was a beautiful June day, and no more congenial task can be imagined than Milly entered upon when,

her duties at Rochester House over, she set out to make her choice of the newest summer materials at Denham and Dibble's. She chose four pretty, dainty dresses,—it was characteristic of Milly that she began with the dresses, not with the underclothes and boots and shoes,—and a delightful hour was spent selecting a flowered muslin, and a striped washing silk, and a pink and a blue zephyr, to be trimmed with cheap showy lace.

As Milly went in to Denham and Dibble's to make her purchases, Mary went up from the wash-tub to be locked into her cell. The first hot weather had come with a rush, making Mary enter into the Israelites' longing for fresh vegetables in the wilderness. Mary had set herself resolutely to keep out of the infirmary, into which it was the aim of all the other prisoners who could find any pretext for admittance there to get, and her strong constitution and habit of working hard backed up her will. But the strain of the life, following the great shock of her conviction, and combined with a diet so different from that to which she had always been used, were beginning to tell on her health in a way that caused both the matron and Miss Saunders genuine distress. They would gladly have alleviated her punishment, had it been in their power to do so, but the discipline of a prison was as inflexible with regard to the officers as the prisoners, and they could not relax the rules.

The matron, indeed, had pointed out to the doctor how thin and colourless No. Thirteen was getting. But Mary never complained or asked to consult him, as at any time she had the right to do, and the doctor's long experience had made him disbelieve in the existence of a prisoner who would go on working when physically unfit to do so.

It was not merely her spirit that kept her going, but also the fact that her work was of value, and that Miss Saunders would find it difficult to do without her. There were not many available for work in the laundry who had not escaped from it on account of physical disability, and with those who did their allotted task, laziness and incapacity made them as workers almost more trouble than they were worth, while, just then, there was an unusual amount of washing to be done, in consequence of the male part of the prison being filled after a riot. It was Mary who did everything that required care, or must be got through quickly. The knowledge that there was not another prisoner who could do the starching and iron the warders' clothes as she could, made her toil on unflinchingly, in the teeth of that sense of perpetual weariness which was to her a new experience. And the bright smile with which she came down to her work every morning was quite touching to the laundry officer, fresh from her own good breakfast, which she would have gladly taken in to Mary in the place of her gruel, but for those iron rules.

But if the warders of the prison could do nothing materially to lighten her lot, beyond her emancipation from the work before breakfast, which the matron accomplished by sending her to exercise from 6.30 to 7.30, the sense she had of their sympathy and their satisfaction in her work did more than anything else could have done to cheer her labour.

But this evening, when she got back to her cell with the week's ironing finished that Miss Saunders had expected to last through half to-morrow, an odd, indescribable feeling came over her; it seemed as if she had no power left. When her supper was brought, she looked at it with the oddly-combined sensations of

being almost famished, and not being able to eat. There were other things for which she felt a craving, a glass of fresh milk, a plate of strawberries,—above all, a cup of tea, such as they were now drinking at the farm,—but she could not touch the gruel.

That was foolish and dainty, Mary said to herself. Was it not one of the things she had set herself to learn in prison, to overcome her daintiness? and she took a spoonful of the gruel. It was a little burnt, an accident not unknown to the porridge at Ravenhill Farm, so there was no reason to be aggrieved; but she felt it an excuse to her own conscience for leaving the mess she had always, with due regard to the fourteen hours without food before her, obliged herself to swallow.

Needlework had now taken the place of knitting as her evening occupation. Her work was left in the cell, and it was her habit to employ most of her midday rest-time with it. Her beautiful button-holes and rows of fine stitching might have been considered thrown away on the coarse garments they adorned, and her extra work could not bring her in more marks than the fixed maximum, but Mary could not bear to do a thing beneath her best.

But to-day she had not felt equal to doing anything at midday, and now it was only by a great effort she succeeded in getting through the task expected of her. Her eyes grew dark, as she tried to put in the stitches, and she had barely accomplished the allotted work by the time the bell rang for the prisoners to go to bed.

All through the night Mary tossed about, hot, restless, and exhausted. She had often done that before, but to-night she seemed hotter and more utterly worn out. The next morning was a wet

one, and she had to set to work on her task at 6.30. As a rule, she had three of the paved courtyards on the kitchen premises to scrub, but to-day the matron set her to the lighter work of cleaning the corridor. She only gave her a small area to go over, and said kindly—

'You mustn't work too hard on this, Thirteen;' the first time she had ever been called on to use those words to a prisoner. 'We don't want you to get ill; Miss Saunders says she cannot spare you from the laundry.'

Mary looked up with her usual smile, which by now had won the heart of the whole prison staff, even including Miss Pearson; but before her hour was over she was lying stretched out on the damp floor in a dead faint.

She took so long to come round that the doctor was called up.

'Why didn't the girl send for me before?' he said, when he had made his examination. 'But she will be all right again after a day or two's rest and treatment.'

After all, she had not been able to keep out of the infirmary! It was with a fresh sense of failure that Mary took her place among the patients there, not knowing that the infirmary was to be the scene of her final battle in that hard campaign, a battle which would give her the opportunity for her crowning triumph.

The infirmary ward, as Mary was taken into it, struck her with its depressingly prison aspect. The windows were placed, as they were throughout the gaol, so high that nothing could be seen through them; there were no flowers, no pictures, none of the brightening surroundings associated with a hospital ward; it was only an enlarged cell. The

warder in charge of it, moreover, was the strictest disciplinarian in the prison, and more successful in the difficult task of imposing silence than any other of the officers.

There was extra need of this with Mary's entrance, for two of the occupants of the infirmary were of that class of habitual criminals versed in all evil knowledge, from which it was desirable to keep a first offender apart, especially such a one as Mary, whose exceptional character and the purity of whose bringing-up made doubly imperative the duty of keeping her uncontaminated.

A sullen silence hung accordingly over the infirmary, a sense of repression which made the mental atmosphere gloomy, although Mary was far from wishing to converse.

Since Good Friday her feelings towards her fellow-prisoners had changed; the note of divine compassion had been struck in her heart. She had learnt, following Mr. Despard's thought, to feel it a solemn privilege to have thus been made one with the wicked and disgraced; the fact that her daily toil was for them, had sanctified the hard labour, instead of, as at first, rendering it intolerably repulsive. But the feeling which made her wish to help them, had it been in her power to do so, did not cause Mary to desire their company as comrades; and since the prison rules put any intercourse by which she could aid them out of the question, so long as she was within those walls, it was something of a relief to her that they had one and all shunned her, as belonging to a different class and category from themselves, and too much 'in with' the authorities to be game to enter into those collusions which it was their joy to effect in defiance of regulations.

A deep compassion came over her now for the mother lying at death's door, whose child played unconsciously at her side, crowing with delight, as it dragged down the coverlet from one of the beds, till its noisy rejoicing was checked by the nurse. From the pale face of the suffering woman who lay in the bed next her own, Mary's glance travelled to the form of a girl with her arm in a sling, who sat listlessly by the fireplace. The face was familiar to her. Evidently, by the look in the girl's eyes when they met hers, she was recognised by the girl. It was the pickpocket whom Mary had refused to give into custody that evening fourteen months ago. As her eyes met Mary's, the girl lifted her finger warningly, and shook her head, and from that time, throughout the day, she avoided looking at Mary again.

The food in the infirmary, though it did not comprise any of those especial luxuries of which Mary had dreamt, was good and plentiful, and after a day of perfect rest, with a diet of beef-tea, rice-pudding, and bread and milk, she began to revive. Her head grew clearer, and the ache in her back less pronounced. She lost the perpetual sensation of sickness, the unexplained pains grew less, and when the lights were turned down for the night she fell into a refreshing sleep.

It was somewhere about two o'clock in the morning, when the sound of her name, repeated several times in a low voice, woke her, startled, from her slumbers. It was the first time she had heard it uttered since she entered the prison.

'Mary . . . Mary Copeland . . .' Then an emphatic 'Hush!' and a hand laid firmly on her arm. She opened her eyes, and in the dim light recognised the form of the pickpocket bending over her.

'Don't speak! Don't make a sound! Miss Peel sleeps as light as a feather, and if she wakes up we're done for. I know who it was took that bracelet.'

Mary started up in bed, but the girl held her firmly down.

'Stay where you are!' she hissed, with an imprecation. 'I know where that ring is. I know who's got it. I can get the whole evidence for you that will set you free.'

Mary's heart gave a wild throb, and she could hardly repress a cry; but the girl laid a hand over her lips, once more enjoining her to silence.

'I was at your trial,' she said. 'I heard it all. I knew you was innocent, but I wouldn't speak then, for the sake of my bloke. It's him that got that ring, and I know how to get the truth out of him. When that's tracked back, they'll soon lay hold on the real thief. You think I don't know who that is, but I do. Her name was Milly.'

Again Mary could scarcely restrain a sound; but her companion was prepared for this, and she felt the hand on her mouth pressed tighter.

'She sent off the ring by post that night to friends in London,' the girl began, and in a few words she explained what had subsequently happened. The ring had been stolen by the postman in London who should have delivered the letter, and he had taken it to a dealer in stolen goods who was an old friend of the pickpocket's. The girl had actually seen the ring, and was able to describe it to Mary, though she maintained a discreet reserve as to her own relations with the firm of receivers of stolen goods, beyond the fact that her 'bloke' had played her false, but for which she would never have been

'copped,' and if these disclosures did him an injury, it would serve him out as he deserved.

'I'm in for two years,' she ended, with another imprecation, which sounded the more terrible to Mary, as coming from the lips of a woman. 'But I've got a pal here as is going out on Monday. If you'll write a letter to your father or your friends, or anyone else that has got the 'oof, and tell them they are to pay her two pounds down, and twenty pound more when she's got the proofs and the evidence all pat to show that it was "Milly" took it and not you, I swear to you Milly will be shut up and you'll be free before a week is out. . . . Here's a bit of pencil . . . you don't know how I got it? Oh, you're not up to the ropes yet!'—with the pride the habitual prisoner always takes in any successful eluding of the vigilance of the officials.—'You can tear a page out of your Bible—you ain't quite so soft, I suppose, that you can't do that much, and give it to me without her suspecting. She's less likely to suspect you than most, you're so green. I shan't be in but one night longer, but that'll be time enough.'

There were signs of stirring on the warder's part, and the girl crept back to her bed, leaving her words to work.

Their effect on Mary was extraordinary. In a moment it seemed as though the whole fabric built up in two months of hard spiritual labour, all the high teachings of Mr. Despard, the deep lessons of Good Friday and Easter, the hours of lonely meditation and heart-felt prayer, were to be swept away at one blast.

Free! Free! Vindicated! Righted! The prison doors opened to let her out! Proclaimed before all the world as an innocent, unjustly punished woman!

To her credit be it said, that even at this moment there was no sense of vindictive triumph over the culprit who had brought her misery on her. Mary had too often prayed for that unknown person, whom, with returning balance, her mind had recognised to be her only genuine enemy, since all the others who had taken part in her imprisonment had been but instruments of what they considered justice. She did not even dwell much on the idea of being emancipated; to get a person out of prison took longer than to get him in, and it could only be a few weeks—if Mrs. Beddoes was right it might only be a few days—of incarceration she would be spared. The one thought in her mind was the establishment of her innocence; if she were set free from the prison as an innocent person only the day before her sentence had expired, that was the thing at thought of which Mary's whole nature rose in a palpitating longing, such as she had never felt before for anything on earth.

But, as the first rush of the tempest passed away, a still, small voice within her soul brought to her memory that inward sacrifice, the offering of which had brought to her such light and peace, when she had made God's discipline, the bearing of this unjust punishment, her own choice.

If it was His will, she had chosen to endure it. But it was not God's will that the guiltlessness of the innocent should not be made clear, and the guilty should remain unpunished; so her human nature made quick answer. Was not the Old Testament full of promises that the just should be vindicated, and transgressors receive the reward of their deeds?

Yes, the Old Testament, but what about the New? And even those portions of the earlier writings which had taught the world in its religious childhood, when

a prophet or psalmist rose to a higher knowledge of God—did not they say, again and again, that the working out of justice must be left to Him; that no end, however desirable, justified bad means?

That these means were bad became clear to Mary, as soon as she was able to give the matter collected thought. It was her honourable instinct that woke first, to stem the torrent of her wild desire; because our right instincts are the result of years of habit, and as such are the strong foundations of our character. Had Mary's lately erected castle of self-oblation been built on the sands of a fine impulse, it would have fallen at the onslaught of the winds and waves, but the ground-work on which it had been raised was of solid rock.

In order to send the message the pickpocket required, Mary would have to involve herself, and two others, in disobedience to the rules of the gaol. The idea of tearing a leaf from the Bible entrusted to her, to write the forbidden note, was revolting to her conscience. To give that note, as the pickpocket proposed, to one of the other prisoners was a most serious breach of prison discipline, which would get the girl into terrible trouble, were it discovered, and make the woman who consented to take it out with her liable to another term of imprisonment. Once more the visions of dark cells and strait-waistcoats, which had long ceased to torment Mary's mind as her own possible fate, came before her. What, if on the day she was set free the women who had saved her were relegated to the 'darks' and bread and water, and the 'pal' began a fresh term of hard labour!

Even supposing that the pickpocket and her friend's ingenuity might be relied on to avoid detection, what

right had she, Mary, the 'sufferer as a Christian,' to allow these two ignorant and sinful women to do the deeds that would make them liable to punishment, so that she might regain her reputation for innocence? Could she feel that to free herself thus would be God's will?

Stronger and clearer every moment came the voice that told her, No.

Yet the temptation was terrible, stronger than Mary could have supposed the temptation could ever come to her, to involve another in sin. She tried to persuade herself, or, more correctly speaking, another power within her tried to persuade her, that for these women to do this thing, in order to help her to justice, would not be sinful; but she was too honest to be able to satisfy her conscience thus. Even taking it that they would be doing right to break the prison rules for the sake of gaining money—and she could not imagine the 'pal' at least could have any other motive—the possibility of their punishment, caused by her, remained.

Then another thought crept into Mary's mind, the thought of Milly, the person in whose place she had been suffering this punishment, of late with perfect submission.

What would life in prison for Milly mean? If, for herself, with her strong constitution and habit of hard work, the strain on the health had proved sufficient to break her down, what would be the result of it on the feebler physique of Milly, who had, too, never been accustomed to any but mental toil?

If she, with all there was at the background of her life, in the love and absolute confidence in her innocence at least of all at home, with the consciousness of being guiltless, with her strong religious principle to support her, found it needed every consideration she could

muster, to enable her to go courageously through her day, how would Milly be able to bear that punishment, and probably for a much longer period, with none of these supporting influences? If even she had dreaded to look forward to the time when she would have to meet life, and make her way in the world bereft of her character in public estimation, what sort of prospect would Milly have to look forward to, when she came out, having no one to look to but an angry brother? Robert would be desperately angry, Mary knew that; and the thought of him gave a new motive for her own silence. Poor Robert, for whose sorrow at her refusal of him she could feel as she had never done before, now she herself had learnt what it was to love! Might not this shielding of his sister be a sort of restitution to him for the pain she had, through her own thoughtlessness, brought him? In the days when he came courting her, Mary had not thought of love-making as a very serious thing, or of a love disappointment as something to be taken greatly to heart. Now she knew how bitter could be the pang, at the thought of losing the love of the second self to whom the heart had been given. For Robert's sake, if for no other reason, she would not deliver Milly over to justice, so she said to herself.

Yet to keep firm in this resolution necessitated a hard conflict. Over and over again, when she thought she had gained a final victory, the longing to have her innocence proved to the world broke forth afresh. Did not the exceptional circumstances justify the breaking of regulations never intended to injure the innocent? If Milly suffered from the punishment that would be inflicted on her by the law, would not the suffering be richly deserved?

The punishment would be deserved, as she answered

herself frankly. Mary did not attempt an over-strained charity, which should make her excuse Milly's iniquitous conduct. But her thoughts, much directed lately to the subject of punishment, through her own experience and by the preaching of Mr. Despard, which had been mainly on this topic, had led her to consider it from the point of view of its remedial character. It was as a cure for sinfulness that punishment was valuable, Mr. Despard had said. Would Milly be made better for a term in prison? Again Mary reflected upon her own experience. That her time in gaol was being infinitely blessed to her was true; but without the faith that inspired her, what would have been the result of the endless hours of solitary thinking, of the long, long Sundays, with no companion but a Bible! But for a submission to it, as the discipline laid on her by God Himself, to what utter dejection, bordering on despair, would not the depressing surroundings, the monotonous work, the iron rule of the prison, lead?

Milly must inevitably suffer — perhaps she had already begun to suffer in consequence of her misdoing—but Mary resolved that it should not be her own hand that should bring the suffering upon the woman who had so cruelly injured her.

Number Thirteen was not so well the next morning as she should have been. After a night of battle it could not be but that she felt exhausted, but it was with a brighter smile than ever that she answered the warder's inquiries after her health, and she was sure that she would be able to get up later on in the day. In fact, by the evening, she was allowed to sit up, although feeling extraordinarily weak and shaky.

The baby was fretful to-day, and Mary offered to take him.

'Do you think you can hold him?' asked Miss Peel.

Her face lost its usual stern expression, as Mary answered by a smile and two outstretched arms, and there was a new tone in her voice when, at the end of the evening, she took the sleeping child from her, saying—

'You have managed wonderfully to keep him so quiet all these hours, Thirteen!'

From that time the nurse and she became staunch friends. When night came on, Mary lay awake with a heart that she could not keep from beating, awaiting what she felt would be a difficult scene with the pickpocket. She was not wrong in this anticipation. When all was quiet, and the regular breathing of the warder showed that at last she slept, the girl came over to Mary's bedside.

'Have you got it for me?' she whispered. 'You . . . fool! I'm going to have it in writing.'

'You are not going to have it at all.'

The pickpocket uttered an oath. 'Then, I shan't lift up a finger to save you, and, let me tell you, I'm the only person that can do it! They've been offering one hundred pounds reward for that ring, but it'll never be tracked out that way, because there ain't no ring. It's been melted down long ago, and you can't ever get at no evidence to tell who stole it except through me, and what I can tell about my pal. That's gospel truth; I'll swear it to you on the Bible.'

Somehow, depraved as the girl was, Mary felt a conviction—a just one—that she was not deceiving her now, that it was really her last chance of having her innocence proved which she was putting away from her. But, when the lonely struggle, with none

but God to witness, has been won, the conflict that follows in the sight of men is not likely to end in defeat.

'I have made up my mind to do nothing,' Mary replied firmly. 'I don't doubt your word, but nothing you say to me can make any difference.'

The pickpocket, with a final emphatic expression as to her opinion of Mary's sense, and a parting outpouring of bad language, left her.

'You'll just be looked on as a thief and a gaol-bird to your dying day!' were her last words, as she stole back to bed.

Mary remained in the infirmary till she was as completely cured as she ever would have been without the breath of outer air, the sight of outer scenes. She was so useful that Miss Peel was anxious to keep her as long as possible.

'Thirteen is a born nurse, she ought to be in a hospital; and her way with children would make you think she'd had the care of them all her life,' was the stern woman's verdict on her new patient. 'It's that smile of hers that takes so with sick folk or babies.'

Indeed, Mary's smile was a ray of sunshine that could ill be spared from the infirmary.

When, at the end of a week, the doctor pronounced her off the sick list, there was a touching farewell between her and the two women to whom she had ministered, with pleasant recollections of Joseph's serving of his fellow-captives, with the baby who clung to her and cried as she gave him up to his mother, and the warder who had found her so uncommon a patient.

Mary still looked so changed from what she had been when she went into prison, and she had so well proved her pluck in going on uncomplainingly with

her work till she had literally dropped, that the doctor's feelings were singularly lenient to her now, and she would have had no difficulty in persuading him that she was not fit to return to the hard labour for the remainder of her sentence. But Mary had in her mind the words of the matron: 'Miss Saunders says, she cannot do without you in the laundry,' coupled with the knowledge of what difficulty she must have just now in getting the work of the institution done with the means at her command.

'I think I am well enough to go back to the washing, sir,' she said. 'I never have missed a day except just this week, when I was in the infirmary; and now my time here is getting so short, I am sure I shall be able to work up to the end.'

It was such an original way of looking at things, so unique an ambition for a hard labourer, that Dr. Philpotts laughed.

'You don't want to be let off your work, then?'

'No, sir.'

'Not half of it?'

'No, sir, thank you,' Mary answered, with one of her characteristic smiles.

So Thirteen went back to the laundry.

CHAPTER XVI

HIDDEN THINGS BROUGHT TO LIGHT

MILLY stood in her room, with all her possessions spread about it; boxes open; everything delightfully suggestive of the coming change which was to mean so much to her. It was the third of July, and Robert was coming to-day! He was to spend one night in Exbridge, not at Pernambuco Lodge, which happened to be full, but with his first mate's sister, who had proved to be no other than Mrs. Collins, and the next day he was going to take Milly away to Hull, from which port his ship would sail for Australia before the end of the week.

There had been a great many delays, intensely trying to Milly, who saw the day approaching nearer and nearer when Mary should be released, with a feverish longing to be away before that day, to have said good-bye to all her relatives before they had seen Mary and heard the suspicions which, it seemed to Milly's guilty mind, must have entered hers during those three months.

'Though she will never be able to prove them—never, never!' Milly had repeated to herself again and again, but without gaining thereby complete peace. She had not even brought herself to write

and tell Robert anything about Mary's accusation and imprisonment. If he should leave England without knowing of it, she would be glad; and there was a possibility of this, could he be persuaded not to go out and see the cousins at Ravenhill Farm. Since Mary's refusal of him, he had never once mentioned her name in his letters, so perhaps he would prefer keeping out of her way. If he did hear about what had happened, Milly would explain that she had not liked to write him such terrible news, but had waited till his arrival to break it to him.

But if Robert saw Mary, and Mary, in the might of her innocence and the justice of her wrath, accused her of what she had actually done . . . Robert had so high an opinion of Mary . . . !

But now it was all right. Robert was to come to-day, and they would both be gone to-morrow morning. As the prison gates opened on Mary, their train would be flying away with them northward. Yes, it was all right now !

Milly looked at the pretty dresses spread out upon her bed, at the smart hats, at the new umbrella with a silver handle, which had been Malcolm's present to her. She thought how kindly he had spoken as he gave it to her, how much he had told her that he would miss her, and the foolish castle in Spain she had built up on his renewed friendship assumed substantial proportions. Australia was not so far from Canada as it was from England, and if, before they parted, Malcolm said the words that secured her for his own, she would be willing to wait as many years as might intervene between now and the day when he was able to claim her as his wife.

Milly put her new garments into her boxes one by one, enjoying the occupation of packing as she had never enjoyed anything in the way of employment before. She had never possessed so many pretty new things in her life; she had never had so bright a prospect as that which now opened out before her.

Milly was just carefully wrapping up a smart little pair of very pointed shoes, when there was a knock at the door, and the servant brought in a letter addressed to

'MR. ROBERT LADBROKE.'

That seemed as if he were near indeed; Milly took it with a laugh.

'Why, that's Aunt Susan's handwriting,' she said to herself. 'How funny of her to write to him, when I had told her I should bring him out to see her and say good-bye!'

Milly had not seen her aunt since the day when she had expressed her conviction of Mary's innocence. Miss Ladbroke had been away on a long visit to friends in London, much to her niece's relief. But she had now returned, and must be said good-bye to. Robert, too, must be taken to see her; but Milly had, in the letter in which she announced her intention of bringing him, written the following:—

'If I were you I wouldn't say anything to Robert about Mary. I have kept it from him myself, to spare his feelings, and I should think Aunt Alice and all of them would be glad if he never knew it. Living out of England, as we are going to, there is no need that he should. I would rather do what was kindest by them all.'

Milly had just packed the last of her pretty frocks in the new box she had bought out of her extra bit of salary, when there was a loud ring at the front door bell.

'It is Robert!' she cried, and downstairs she ran, to find she had been right. It was Robert who stood there in the hall, tall and broad and sunburnt as ever. He took her into his strong arms and kissed her with a tenderness she had never received from him before.

'Oh, Robert, I'm so glad you've come!' she said, with a little gasp that was almost a sob. 'And you're going to take me straight away with you, aren't you?'

'Yes, to-morrow morning by the first train. The Catherine is to sail on Wednesday. My first mate's wife is coming too, you know, and I have fitted up a smart little cabin for you and her. It's all done with pink. That's your favourite colour, isn't it? And I've been buying a heap of things to take out, to furnish our house that we're going to have at Sydney. Mrs. Perrins is a nice woman; you and she will cotton to each other at once, I know. They're going to settle in Sydney too, so she'll be a nice friend for you. Two semi-detached houses, one for us and one for them, so that you and Mrs. Perrins can run in and out to each other; that's what we've been talking about.'

He went on describing all the delightful plans he had made, till their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Malcolm, just returned from the bank. He looked into the sitting-room, not knowing it was occupied.

'Don't run away!' exclaimed Milly, as he was about to leave the room apologetically. 'This is

my brother, you know. Robert, this is Mr. Stewart.' The two men shook hands. They 'cottoned to' each other at once, the truth and manliness and honesty that was in both being points they had in common.

A pleasant conversation followed, from which the topic of the Ravenhill family was as much as possible excluded, Milly having explained to Malcolm beforehand that she did not want her brother to know anything about 'poor Mary's disgrace.' It was in fact the delicacy of feeling thus displayed which had warmed his heart towards Milly, and given him a higher opinion than he had before had of her. Hence the increasing kindness of his manner, which she so skilfully misinterpreted. He followed her lead now, and kept the talk away from the quicksands, till at last Robert's blunt question, 'And where is Mary? is she in service still?' made them glance at each other despairingly.

'She is away just now,' Milly answered; and before Robert had time to make further inquiries, she distracted his attention by producing Miss Ladbroke's letter, which he opened and read.

'Aunt Susan wants me to go out and see her this evening,' he said; 'and I'm not to bring you,' with a laugh. 'What does that mean, I wonder?'

It was so evident that he imagined Aunt Susan was planning some pleasant surprise for her, that Milly added another wing to her Spanish castle, by imagining that Miss Ladbroke wanted to give Robert some money to spend on a gift for her. It was a long time since Milly had been given anything by her aunt, and a parting present would be most natural.

'Well, I'd better be starting off now,' remarked

Robert, who was a man of prompt action, 'so as to get back here in time for dinner.'

'I am going in the same direction,' said Malcolm, 'as far as the cross-roads,' where the path diverged to Ravenhill Farm. 'Shall we set out together?'

Robert responded heartily, and they left the house, both turning to smile and nod to Milly, who stood looking after them on the doorstep, when they got to the turn of the street.

They had not gone far on their way when Malcolm caught sight of two ladies who, as they recognised him, waved their parasols and made other demonstrations of joyful recognition.

'How do you do, Mr. Stewart?' said Miss Toto, shaking hands with him as effusively as if he had been one of her dearest friends, while Robert stood back a little, not being taken with the appearance of her and her sister.

'So we have to congratulate you!' said Miss Tiny slily.

Malcolm was interrogative.

'On your engagement, I mean.'

In a moment Malcolm, as the sisters afterwards described it, became 'stiff and solemn.'

'Thank you; I feel myself a man who deserves to be congratulated,' he answered gravely, and it must be added rather haughtily.

'Of course,' responded Miss Toto. 'And she is to be congratulated too, I am sure. When is the wedding going to be?'

'As soon as possible,' replied Malcolm, in exactly the same voice as before.

'Dear little Milly! what a sweet, pretty bride she will make!' said Miss Tiny. 'I hope she is going to ask us to her wedding?'

Robert, who had caught his sister's name without hearing what was said about her, looked interrogatively at Malcolm, who now lost something of his balance.

'You have made a mistake,' he said quickly. 'I am not engaged to Miss Ladbroke.'

'Oh dear! . . . I beg your pardon, I'm sure!' exclaimed the two sisters simultaneously. 'We hadn't heard that it was broken off,' said Miss Tiny.

'I hope,' added Miss Toto, in a confidential whisper, 'that it hadn't anything to do with that ring?'

The word *ring* was so burnt into Malcolm's heart that the sound of it made him start.

'What ring?'

'Her engagement ring, of course,' replied Miss Toto; while Miss Tiny, who was gifted with a slightly larger amount of discretion, vainly tried to restrain her sister from going further.

'You mustn't be angry with her for losing it; she never intended to part with it altogether. You know she tried to send it to us, but it must have been lost in the post, for it never reached us. If it had, I am sure she would have soon sent us the money to buy it back again before you missed it from her finger. Poor little thing! She was in such difficulties!'

Too long and too earnestly had Malcolm's brain wearied itself over the effort to trace out the real facts concerning the stealing of that ring, too carefully had he gone into every detail, weighed every possibility, for the words to fall on uncomprehending ears. In an instant the truth flashed upon him—the whole glorious, dreadful truth! His brain reeled for a moment; the next he was himself again.

'I am going to turn back with these ladies,' he said, addressing Robert. 'Do not wait for me.'

Robert stood still. He had overheard enough of the

conversation to understand that there was some mystery connected with Milly.

'Is not this my concern?' he asked.

'It is primarily mine,' Malcolm answered. 'And I would rather speak to these ladies alone.'

Robert looked back into Malcolm's eyes, and read sincerity of purpose and strength to deal with the matter in hand, whatever its mysterious nature might be.

'You will speak to me afterwards,' he said.

'Yes, I will speak to you afterwards.'

Malcolm turned away, and accompanied the two Miss Simpsons to their new quarters, a hotel at a little distance from Pernambuco Lodge.

'We will not discuss this in the street,' he said.

Miss Toto and Miss Tiny were by now thoroughly excited, enjoying the sense of mystery that hung over this affair, and the prospect of the thrilling scene that they saw before them, as such things can only be enjoyed by women of vapid mind and idle life.

'Dear Mr. Stewart, do tell us what this means!' they exclaimed, in a breath, directly they had closed the door in the sitting-room of the hotel.

'It is you who have everything to tell me,' he answered. 'It is no question of breaking confidences. I have a right to know the whole circumstances of this affair.'

Assured that it was not incumbent on them to keep Milly's secret, and feeling, indeed, that they had gone too far in the way of revelation to turn back, the sisters vied with each other in recalling and relating every word she had written them, with the date, which was clear in their memory, because the letter asking if they had received the ring had arrived on Tiny's birthday.

'I believe that I have the letter with me,' said Toto, finally; and she went upstairs to fetch it, while Tiny extracted from Malcolm the whole history of their friend's wrong-doing. Before many minutes Toto returned in triumph with the letter. She had never taken part in anything so like a passage from a novel in her life before. This would give them food for conversation with everyone they met for months to come. It was rather a shock to them when Malcolm said, as, after a careful reading of the letter, and asking permission to take it away with him, he rose to leave—

'You will not, of course, mention this to anybody? It would not be fair to do so until the two families have decided how they are going to act. The truth must be known, of course, but it should be given out from the proper source.'

He had room in his heart already for pity for Robert, when his sister's name should be bandied about from mouth to mouth, with the contempt and horror that would rest on it for ever, when her conduct became known.

His own path of action at this point was by no means clear to him; and, instead of going out to the farm as he had intended, Malcolm set out for a walk in the other direction, to think the matter out. His steps led him the way they had taken him every day for the last three months, till the people who lived in the street of the gaol were wont to smile as he passed by, with his eyes fixed in turn on each of the windows that were visible in the gloomy red building which ran along one side of it, on the chance that one of those sightless windows might belong to Mary's cell.

As he passed the prison to-day, realising that the knowledge of the truth had come to him too late to

save her a single hour of her hard sentence, rage took possession of his usually wise, well-balanced soul, a rage he had no easy task in controlling before he entered the house which contained the woman who had driven her there.

Robert, in the meantime, went on his way, filled with a vague inquietude, and knocked at the door of Miss Ladbroke's house. She opened it for him, and the sight of her face added to his uneasiness.

'What is the matter?' he asked bluntly, without any response to her greeting.

'Come in, Robert; come in here.' She took him into her little sitting-room, and closed not only the door but the window, lest any passer-by might overhear what she had to say.

'It's about Mary,' she answered.

He gave a little start. 'Mary? . . . Well, what is it? . . . Out with it!'

'You know where she is now? . . . No, no, you don't know. She is in gaol!'

Robert uttered an exclamation.

'Yes, she's in gaol for doing something that she never did either; for stealing a ring and a bracelet; and . . .' drawing her chair close up to his, and sinking her voice to a whisper, 'I know who did it.'

'You know who it was, and you let Mary go to prison!'

Robert's voice was quite awful. His love had thrust its roots deep down into his strong, tough nature, and there they were still, though the plant had been snapped off, with her refusal of him.

'I never did know till after she was shut up, and then it was too late. Besides, I'm an old woman, Robert, older than you think. . .' It struck him that

she looked older than he had ever imagined her. 'I'm seventy-three. I didn't feel that I could enter on it, all that it would mean to get the matter righted. I've done my best to make it up to Mary. I've changed my will, and left my money to her. I came into all poor Philip's money, you know, besides what I'd saved, and the old general left me a legacy. It is five thousand pounds; that will be a tidy sum for her to bring her husband.'

'Make it up to her! Do you think money can make it up to Mary for having been put in prison? . . . For having been looked on as a thief? What is five thousand pounds to set off against such a disgrace?'

'She'll be leaving the country almost as soon as she's out of prison. That young man, Malcolm Stewart, that she's engaged to . . .' (again Robert gave a slight start) . . . 'is going to take her with him to Canada. I don't suppose that anyone knows about it out there. She was only put in for three months, and she will be free to-morrow. I have tried to act for the best.'

'Well, all I can say is you've not succeeded. Who is the real thief, and how did you find out?'

'Do you want to know, Robert? If you'd told me I'd done right, I should have left it there. But if you say the truth must be known, I'll tell it you, though I leave it to you to have it published. It was your sister Milly.'

Then she told him all. Robert would not believe it. The keen reasonings and accurate conclusions of the old woman did not perhaps make their way into his less acute masculine brain.

'It's all moonshine!' he said angrily. 'You are

getting old, Aunt Susan, that's it, and old people are full of fancies. There, you'll forgive my speaking like that. I didn't mean to hurt you. But to hear poor little Milly set down as a thief! . . . Well, good-bye!' And, without shaking hands with her, he flung himself out of the house.

While Robert's steps were taking him quickly back to Pernambuco Lodge, Malcolm's were also leading him in the same direction. It was he who reached the house first.

At the foot of the stairs he met Milly herself. His face told her all.

'Mr. Stewart!' she gasped. 'Why, what's the matter? Why do you look at me like that?'

With the courage of despair she dragged him into the drawing-room, and shut the door behind them. Her only hope lay in what she could do with him alone, before he had told anyone else, before he had met with Robert.

'I know everything!' he answered. The tremble in his voice, like the quiver of heat that rises from a burning landscape, frightened her even more than his face had done.

'Everything!' he repeated. Then there was a terrible silence between them.

'Oh, Mr. Stewart!' Milly burst out. 'Have pity on me! It was all for love of you I did it, all . . . all!'

Those books that she had read, which taught her that love was enough to palliate any crime, also showed that if a woman threw herself on a man's mercy, making it clear to him that affection for him alone had been her motive, he would forgive her everything — and accept it as a splendid sacrifice of hard principle to warm human affection. And

Milly, who had never humbled herself before God, fell down upon her knees before a man.

'Pity me! pity me!' she repeated imploringly. 'Don't let people know! Take me away from here. Oh, save me! I was so madly in love with you, and I felt she was drawing your heart from me. You were getting to care for her more; and at first, oh, Malcolm, you know it, you were in love with me.'

Under any other circumstances Milly's theatrical attitude would have struck Malcolm with its absurdity; but the position was too tragic, its issues too desperately serious for the comic aspect of it even to reach him.

'You!' he answered. 'I in love with *you!*' That was all he said. It was enough. He was not thinking of how he was speaking; the words were forced out of him by the woman, already so low in his esteem, who had lowered herself yet further by the avowal of passion she had made at his feet. So completely had she degraded herself in his sight that, but for the image of Mary which was always before his eyes, the whole of womanhood would have sunk in his estimation through this member of it. The contempt and loathing that went into that one word '*you*' were all the more crushing because they were involuntary.

Milly was still on her knees, with her hands upraised, when the door burst open, and Robert entered.

'What does this mean?' he asked, laying a rough hand on his sister's shoulder, and almost dragging her to her feet.

'Do you believe this too?' he asked, looking at Malcolm . . . 'believe that my sister is a thief?'

'I do not believe; I know.'

'How do you know it?'

Robert looked desperately fierce, though whether as her own champion or as Mary's avenger, Milly did not know.

'Beware, sir, how you bring an accusation like this against my sister!' he said. And Milly felt how powerful a defender her brother would have been against any accuser who had been uttering a falsehood.

'Where are your proofs?'

'I have my proof here, in this letter,' Malcolm answered, while Milly hid her face in her hands, afraid to look at either of these men, who were the two beings to whom alone her heart had given its love. 'But I have no need of proofs. Your sister herself has told me!'

CHAPTER XVII

AFTERWARDS

THE day had come, the day to which Mary had looked forward, at first with alternate longings for her freedom and shrinking from the next chapter of life, as life must be for her, with the prison stain tingeing each page of it. She was homeless, because she could never burden Ravenhill Farm with her presence, and her resolution not to marry Malcolm, whatever his own wishes, had then been firm, and with only the chance of the meanest calling by which to earn her bread; later, with a sense that she must leave her future in trust, sure that He who had helped her through her prison life would help her through the life that was to follow—the day of her liberty.

But now, as she laid aside her prison garments, and put on her own clothes again, the thought that to-day she would breathe the air as a free woman, that she would be with those she loved, overcame all the sadness of the situation. She knew that she must return home for a little while to recover her health, for she was not strong enough just now for the kind of place she would have to take. The time had been when she had felt she could not stand going home at all, to meet the friends of all

degrees, from the farm labourers to the people at the Hall, with this stigma upon her; now she knew that she could stand it very well. She felt that she would be brave enough to go to church on Sunday, in spite of all the curious glances that would rest upon her, mingled with pity, or contempt, or the combination of the two, which is to the disgraced the most intolerable thing to face. With her humility had come great courage; she was ready to receive with gratitude the kind greetings of those who still were friendly with her, and not to take it to heart, if some had found appearances too strong for their belief in her, and preferred to shun her society. Even if Malcolm, taking her message as she told herself she must expect him to have done, and acting upon it, came no more across her path—with a tightness of the heart Mary faced this possibility—better that than to have really departed from the narrow path, the time it grew so very narrow, and proved herself innocent by becoming guilty.

'So your time in prison is over, Thirteen!' said the matron, with an extra kindness in her voice, and a glistening in her eyes that surprised Mary. 'I must not call you Thirteen any more, though. It has been a cruel thing your having to spend these months in here.'

'But you have all been so good to me, ma'am,' Mary answered, astonished as well as touched at the testimony just given that the matron believed her guiltless.

'That we try to be to every poor creature who is given into our charge, but the discipline of a gaol was never intended for the innocent.'

Mary's eyes opened wide, her lips quivered. There

was something more than inward assurance here. The matron bent forward and kissed her!

'We shall miss you very much,' she said. 'Your example has told more than you may imagine. But, there . . . I must not keep you longer. There is someone waiting for you in my room.'

She led the way to her own pleasant apartment, to whose bright atmosphere of pictures, books and flowers, she would often have been glad to invite Mary from her lonely cell, even before she did more than guess what she had learnt for certain to-day—the injustice of her sentence.

The matron opened the door of her room, let Mary in, and closed it; she felt that meeting was too sacred for any witness.

'Mary! . . . My Mary!'

The next moment Mary was in Malcolm's arms, realising for the first time how weak she was, and how delightful it could be to feel weak, as those strong arms clasped her to his breast. For a few seconds he could not speak; then he held her from him, so that he could look into her face, though his own was twitching still.

It was a look in which the anxiety which had preyed upon him through all his eager longing for this meeting mingled with a depth of tenderness. How would he find her when she came out of this living grave? What would have been the effect on her of those three terrible months? What the effect might be, the comprehension that comes of an absorbing love had given. He who had listened to the account of the way she had borne herself through the day of her trial, had seen her face as she was taken off to prison, and had received her heart-broken message, knew to what danger her nature had been subjected. Would she ever be the

same Mary, the guileless, loving, sunny-hearted woman she had been, when she emerged from that cruel furnace? Malcolm had been prepared to find her a changed being; her simple belief gone, her heart embittered, only, through a continued outpouring of his own love and tenderness upon her, to be warmed back to faith and hope and love.

As he looked into her face the anxiety melted from his eyes, and gave way to an expression of positive reverence. She was not the same Mary, indeed; she was a woman sweeter, nobler, more saintly. It only needed to look thus into her face to tell him that.

'Thank God!' he said, as he had said once before, when he saw by the look which Mary gave him back, when he told her he loved her, that her heart was his. But the words had a deeper meaning to-day, that came from the deepening of his own nature which had resulted from these three cruel months — his first experience of real trouble.

'Yes, thank God!' she responded, though she did not know the thought that was in his mind.

And there was silence for a little while.

'But did you never get my message?' Mary asked, when they began to talk again.

"I got it, but I didn't keep it; it was of no use to me. Did you think I should love you *less* because you were in trouble, Mary? that I should believe in you *less* because the world turned against you?'

'Just at first I did. You see I did not understand your not coming to me.'

'I never got your father's note,' he put in hastily. 'Surely you guessed that was the reason afterwards?'

'I thought there must have been some mistake. From the time that I learnt to believe in God's love again, I felt certain of yours. I did not feel that I

ought to marry you, to bring disgrace into your family . . . I don't want to do that now, Malcolm . . . but I had an idea that you yourself would not want to give me up.'

'I'm not much to boast of, certainly,' responded Malcolm. 'But I am not quite such a poor specimen as all that! I meant to prove to you that I could make up for the insult the world put upon you by making you out guilty, by my own adoration . . . no, that's not too strong a word. But now I shan't have the opportunity of showing you how well I believe in you, for the whole truth is out. The real thief has been discovered.'

Mary caught her breath.

'Does her brother know?' was her first question. 'Oh, poor Robert!'

'Mary! You knew who it was! You knew all the time, and you let yourself be imprisoned for her sake?'

'No, Malcolm, no, indeed. If I had known at first, I should never have been here. But . . .' Then she told him simply what had happened, not hiding from him how hard a struggle it had needed to keep to the course of action which was right.

When she looked up at the end into his face, it was again agitated.

'I used always to wonder whether the daughter of Potipherah was good enough for Joseph,' he said. 'There is no question about whether I am good enough for you. I am not worthy to touch the ground you tread on.'

With a strange quick impulse, due perhaps to some subtle train of heredity in that southern blood there was in him, Malcolm went on his knees and kissed the hem of Mary's dress.

'Do you think you will be able to walk to Rochester House?' Malcolm asked, after telling Mary of the colonel's especial wish that he should see her before she went home. Though he had been prepared for some physical change, resulting from her three months' confinement, it went not the less to his heart to see how pale her face was, now the first blushes had died off it, and how large her eyes. The hands he held in his, as though he were afraid to let them go, lest someone should come and snatch her from him again, were as thin now as her mother's, and all the plumpness was gone from her form. She looked to him very fragile, a delicate flower, so precious that it could be worn in one place only, the place nearest his heart.

'I think I shall be equal to that much,' she said gaily. 'Would you like to know what I got through yesterday?'

But the subject of Mary's labour in prison was too sore a subject for him to be able to smile back.

In spite of Mary's assurances that she was perfectly equal to going to the Bridgers on foot, he would have gone in search of a carriage for her, if it had not been for his eager wish to get her away from the hateful precincts of the gaol, to which he had not grown in the slightest degree reconciled, and his reluctance to leave his newly recovered treasure for a moment. But, as she said, the walk was really nicer, because it took so much longer than a drive would have done, and it was such a treat to go along a road, instead of round and round an asphalte court, and everything she saw was so intensely interesting.

'I must look at the whole of the trees that I've been watching the tops of, all this time,' she said, as they emerged from the paved court, that it had been so

often her duty to scrub, into the outer portion of the grounds.

A few seconds more, and the key had turned in the strong outer door, to let her through, and Mary stood in the street—a free woman! The sight of the flowers in the flower cart, that met their eyes as they passed out under the great arch, made her give a little cry of joy; a group of laughing children at their play made her laugh too. It seemed as if she had been shut out from all these things for years.

There was plenty for the two lovers to hear and tell as they made their way down slowly, Mary leaning on Malcolm's arm, because he would have it so, into the town. Malcolm had feared that the subject of her prison life might be too painful for her to dwell upon, but the pain had all melted away now. 'And a long while ago,' as she told him, 'for, of course, I didn't mind the washing.'

When they came to a jeweller's shop they stood still.

'I want to get you a wedding present,' Mary said. 'You thought I hadn't any money, didn't you? I never shall have any more of my own, but here are my earnings . . . what I made by my work while I was in prison . . . two and threepence. It would have been half-a-crown if I had not been ill for a week, and had "S" put against my name instead of eight marks.'

Malcolm tried to laugh, but somehow his eyes filled instead.

'Let us go in and see what I can get for that!' Mary said gaily; so in they went, and she found a little amber heart, which Malcolm took without a word, because he could not speak. It was as something sacred that he held it — the gift

represented all that hard toil which had made his Mary what she was to-day.

'I have something to buy too,' he said at last, clearing his throat. And he addressed the shopman. 'A plain gold ring, the thickest you have, please.'

The ring was fitted on Mary's finger, and he chose another for a guard to it, a ruby with one diamond.

'No, it is not extravagant,' he said, in answer to Mary's remonstrances. 'I haven't worked for my present to you,' he explained, as they went out of the shop; 'but I have been saving up for it,' with a laugh. 'It is odd that the price should have come exactly to the sum of what Miss Sheridan deducted from my weekly bills when I left off taking dinner, and made some other little changes in my way of living.'

'Do you mean that for the last three months you have gone without your dinner?'

'I couldn't have eaten it, Mary. I never did sit down to a meal without thinking how much better it was than yours. Miss Sheridan's "plain" breakfasts were tremendously substantial, compared with what they gave you at the prison. I had tea and bread and butter at half-past five . . . as much of it as I wanted, and my "three-pair-back" bedroom wasn't really the least like a prison cell.'

After this it was Mary who had no words to speak, but the hand on his arm, on one of the fingers of which he had slipped the betrothal ring, said something.

It was not many minutes more before they got to Rochester House. They were taken into the

study, the scene of Mary's first trial and bitter humiliation. The colonel was expecting them. He sat there with his fingers moving nervously. Mary noticed at once a change in his expression and manner, though he did not use words of pity.

'Well, Mary, so you are free again!' he said. It was pleasant to be called 'Mary' instead of 'Thirteen.' 'You have had a bad time in gaol?' Malcolm, watching him, saw that her altered appearance was something of a shock to her old employer, and his tone was distinctly kind.

'Yes, sir, at first,' Mary answered simply.

'You got to like it in the end, eh?'

'Not exactly to like it, sir.' She smiled, and Malcolm saw again the look in the colonel's face which was beginning to melt his heart a little towards Mary's prosecutor.

'What are you going to do now?'

'I am going home first, sir.'

'And then you will have to look out for something to do, I suppose? Well, Mary, Mrs. Bridger and I have been talking it over, and I have spoken to Mrs. Beddoes about it, and we all feel we should like to give you another chance. Johnson's engagement fell through . . . perhaps her young man found out the way she did the lamps! . . . and your old place is vacant. She and Kate say they'd be very glad to have you back, and get rid of the scatter-brained little thing that we have put up with since you left. So . . .'

But Malcolm broke in. 'We are much obliged to you, for what you mean as an act of kindness, but Mary is not going into service any more. She is going to be my wife. Our marriage will take

place as soon as possible, and she will make her home with me.'

'You have stuck to her, then?' responded the colonel, with a look of approval. 'And I don't believe you'll have cause to regret it.'

The expression on Malcolm's face did not betoken that he had ever had an apprehension of doing so. There was a slight pause, then the colonel said,—

'Did they work you very hard in gaol?'

'The work seemed hard,' Mary answered. 'The hours were not long—only seven a day; but they didn't give us much to eat.'

'Did you get paid for it? I understand that prisoners receive some kind of wages.'

'Yes, sir, after the first few weeks one could make nearly a halfpenny a day, if one was very industrious.'

The colonel looked at her hard; he had not imagined Mary capable of irony,—in fact, the answer was perfectly simple.

'Well, I think that your labour must have been worth more than that, if you did your work as well in prison as you did here. I am going to make it up to what I should say its real value must have been.'

He took his cheque-book from a drawer and wrote out a draft, which he put into an envelope.

'There,' he said, holding it out to her. 'If there's a little over what we may call the market value, you must take it for a wedding gift.'

Mary expressed her thanks a trifle doubtfully; the old impulse of pride sprang up in her, bidding her refuse it.

She glanced at Malcolm. Her thought was always his.

'I think that my future wife would prefer not to receive any money from you, sir,' he said. 'We do not require it.'

'You will not allow me to make any reparation?' asked the colonel, addressing himself to Mary. She knew his imperious nature well enough to see the change which had been wrought in him, since he could answer her thus gently. It was not yet in him to say, 'I am sorry that I acted so hastily and harshly to you,' but the word 'reparation' expressed the feeling.

'If you would rather I should take it, sir . . .' she began.

At that moment the door was thrown open and in walked Robert, holding Milly by the hand. It was a hard clutch in which he held her; no handcuffs would have hurt her so much.

'My sister has come to tell you something!' Robert said, his usual brusque manner rougher than ever, as he addressed himself to the colonel. 'She has a confession to make to you.'

The colonel looked at him, then at the trembling figure and miserable face of the wretched girl, dragged there to hear her fate pronounced, the fate she had dreaded so long, and from which her brother had held out no hopes of her escape. To-day the prison gates would close on her, she would go to her just punishment.

The truth flashed on the colonel's mind.

'What have you to say, woman?' he cried, with an access of his old wrath. 'What have you done?'

'I stole the bracelet!' faltered Milly.

'Good Heaven! why did you not confess it before?'

'It has only just been proved against her,' answered

Malcolm, in a cutting voice. He had not forgiven Milly yet.

'Tell the whole thing out now, then!' said the colonel in an awful voice. 'You took the bracelet and the ring too, I suppose, and the money?'

Malcolm interposed. 'I beg your pardon, sir, but I think that it is only due to the innocent person who has suffered the penalty for this woman's crime that all those who were present in this room when she was pronounced guilty should be present to-day to hear her acquitted.'

'You are right,' answered the colonel, as he laid his hand on the bell. Johnson answered it.

'Ask your mistress and all the young gentlemen and ladies to come here at once; and send the servants up, every one of them.'

So Mrs. Bridger and Mr. Harold and Mr. Edward and Miss Blanche and Miss Edith and Miss Dora were all collected, and the servants came up and filed in in a line, Mrs. Beddoes first and Kitty last, just as they had done that evening three months ago. Only then Mary had been in their rank; now she stood apart, beside her champion, her eyes, full of pity,—the only eyes that held any pity for Milly,—resting upon the culprit.

'Three months ago'— the colonel began, when the whole household stood before him. He had intended to make a little speech, but found himself too agitated. He addressed himself therefore to Milly. 'Say what you have to say,' he commanded.

So Milly's confession was made. Every detail of what she had done she told. She had no choice about it, for Robert's iron grip was on her wrist, and he had the night before extorted from her the whole truth.

What the effect was on those who listened can hardly be described. There was a dead silence in the room as she finished. Then the colonel spoke.

'If you had told us this before, in time to save that poor girl . . .'—there was a tremble in his voice—'. . .' part of what she has been enduring through your heinous act, — if you had made this confession of your own free will, to make what amends you could for it, there might have been some question of pity. Now there is none. You shall suffer whatever penalty the law sees fit to impose on you; and I must say, on my own part, that if the judge could make it penal servitude for life, I should not consider the sentence too heavy!'

Then Mary stepped forward, her eyes were full of tears.

'Sir,' she said, in a pleading voice that seemed to thrill through the room, waking a strange emotion in every heart; 'sir, you don't know what you are saying. There is no one who has not been through prison life can fancy what it means — even for a few months, even if one is innocent. You don't know what it is always to feel hungry, always to feel tired, never to be for a moment without something to remind one of one's degradation; to have it stamped on the clothes one wears, on everything one has to touch, to . . .'

A sort of choking sound emitted by Robert attracted Mary's eyes to him, and she stopped short. She had not intended to make him miserable with the picture of what she had gone through, . . . or Malcolm either, but then she could comfort Malcolm.

The colonel sat silent, with his eyes, as the eyes of all in the room were, fixed upon her, until she went on.

'The theft was brought home to me, and I have

worked out the full sentence for it. Must there be two punishments for the one sin? Will you not take it, sir, that I have suffered instead of her?'

'Do you mean to say that you wish this woman to be allowed to go free?'

'Yes, sir.'

Milly looked up. She saw the faces of the two men whose eyes were fixed on Mary as she spoke —those two, whose faces, as they looked at her last night, were burnt for ever into her memory, —and she had her punishment.

There was silence again. Then the colonel once more addressed Milly.

'You have heard the noble words spoken by this woman, whom you have so cruelly and so basely injured. I can say no more. Since she has bought your pardon by the suffering of your punishment, she has the right to grant it to you. If this does not move you, nothing else on earth would. I never remember in my life coming across conduct so utterly depraved as yours has been, or so heroic as hers.'

The scene was over; there was a move, the servants filing out again, each of them stopping to shake hands with Mary, in most instances with wet eyes, and Mrs. Beddoes and Kitty with an overflow of affection.

'May I take my sister away?' said poor Robert.

The colonel nodded; but Miss Edith broke in—

'She must give us the address of those women to whom she sent the ring . . . if her story about that was true.'

'It was true,' said Mary, as Milly hesitated over the explanation which she knew would not be believed. 'They never got the ring. It was stolen by the postman in London.'

'That man we read about in the papers not long ago, who was convicted of stealing several registered letters that had passed into his hands!' answered Edith excitedly. 'But how did you know?' Then Mary had to explain.

'So you went through the last part of your sentence voluntarily!' exclaimed Miss Blanche. 'Father, did you take that in—that Mary might have been set free if she had chosen to write that letter?'

'Do *you* take it in?' said the colonel, looking steadily at Milly. 'Do you realise what your cousin has done for you?'

'Take her away, Robert,' Mary whispered compassionately, with a pressure of his hand. Then aloud to the colonel—

'I think we might go now, sir.'

'Stay,' he said. 'You had promised to accept my wedding present—well, if you hadn't, you were going to. If you have managed to forgive that creature, don't tell me that you cannot forgive an old man who made a mistake, a mistake that you and your husband can never regret half as much as I do, as I shall do all my life.'

He wrote out another cheque, which he enclosed in an envelope, as a hint that it need not be examined then.

'You will do me the favour to allow Mary to accept this,' he said, turning to Malcolm with more dignity than he had ever shown in his domineering days.

Malcolm bowed without speaking. Then every member of the family shook hands with him and Mary. Edith slipped a packet into her hand as she said good-bye.

'I want you to have this,' she said. 'You

won't refuse it, will you? I don't feel that I ever could wear it again, and I should like you to sell it, and get something for yourself that will be of use to you in your new home.'

It was the ruby bracelet.

It was not till they were out in the street again that Robert relaxed his hold on Milly's wrist. He walked with her in silence to the door of Pernambuco Lodge. When they had reached there, he bade her harshly go up to her room.

'And unpack your boxes,' he added.

'Oh, Robert, Robert!' she cried, in a heart-broken voice, 'aren't you going to take me away?'

'Take you away! Do you think I want a thief to keep house for me? Do you suppose I should allow an honest woman like Mrs. Perrins to have you associated with her? Go up to your room and unpack,' he repeated. 'I shall be in presently.'

So Milly went up to her room, on leaden feet enough, and with trembling hands took out of her boxes all her pretty frocks and hats, the umbrella that Malcolm had given her, everything there was in them.

Was Robert going to have her tried and put in prison on his own account? she wondered. After a miserable hour of waiting, Milly heard two pairs of footsteps coming up the stairs. Her heart died within her. He had fetched the policeman to take her! It was not a man who followed Robert into her room, however, but a woman, an old woman with a hooked nose and an indescribable suggestion of fustiness about her.

'These are the things I spoke about,' Robert said, without taking any notice of Milly whatever. 'How much will you give me for them?'

Milly stood, watching the old woman's sharp eyes and dirty fingers occupied among her pretty fresh clothes, and could not repress a sob.

'*This* is what you feel, is it?' said Robert, turning upon her rather brutally. They were his only words to his sister, though he went and opened all her drawers, and glanced into the empty boxes, to make sure she was keeping nothing back.

Mrs. Phoenix took some time over her task of appraising; at last she made her offer—'Five pound ten.' Robert did not haggle over it. He only put aside a few of the things, a very ancient, plainly made and old-fashioned gown, some underclothes, one pair of boots, an old waterproof cloak and some pocket-handkerchiefs, hardly anything more.

'I will take five pounds for the rest,' he said. And Mrs. Phoenix gladly accepted his offer. She paid the money, packed her newly-acquired possessions into the boxes, for which she said she would send round that evening, and left, casting a curious glance from her bright black eyes on Milly as she went out at the door.

'Now,' said Robert, 'there's some brown paper and some string. Make your things up into a parcel.'

While Milly was thus employed, he occupied himself with his penknife in ripping the silk trimming off the body of the only gown left to her besides that she wore, and taking out the feathers and flowers in her hat. The latter was left with only the piece of ribbon that went round it, in reality an improvement, as had been the stripping of the faded trimming off the dress, since shabby plainness is better than shabby finery; but Milly did not think so. The dress and hat, which

Robert had no compunction about crushing, formed another bundle.

'Now we will start,' he said.

'Where are you going to take me?' asked Milly feebly.

'To a place that is a great deal better than you deserve,' was his stern answer. 'Mrs. Collins has very kindly consented to receive you into her house. She says that she offered the situation to you last year, and you refused it. She is not to pay you any wages; whatever you are supposed to earn will go to clearing off the bills you have been running up, the thought of which, as you told me, had a great deal to do with your becoming a thief. This five pounds will not go far towards settling them, and until they are all paid off not one penny shall pass through your hands. What you actually require will be bought for you by Mrs. Collins; but I have told her that the clothes which you bring with you are to last you for a long time to come.'

Milly burst into a flood of bitter tears, but Robert's face remained inexorable. '*These* are the things she really feels!' he was saying still to himself.

'Must I stay in Exbridge? Oh, Robert! don't make me stay on in Exbridge!' she pleaded, sobbing; 'here, where everybody knows me . . .'

'Where else am I to take you? What else am I to do with you?' he asked, in a tone not quite so harsh as it had been. 'I should have no right to put you upon a household where your character was not known. It is exceedingly good of Mrs. Collins to give you this chance, better than anything that we had the right to expect. Are you ready now?'

Milly followed him down the stairs with a veil folded double over her face. She never looked up

once as they walked, each carrying a bundle, from the fashionable quarter of Exbridge to the unfashionable.

Mrs. Collins's reception was kind, though grave; but there was no tenderness in Robert's farewell.

'Won't you give me one kiss before you go, Robert?' Milly pleaded.

'There'll be time enough for that when I come to England again, and find that you have become a changed woman,' he said, turning his back upon her. But at the door a touch of brotherly feeling moved in him. He stopped and looked back, and the stony misery of Milly's face melted a little of his hardness. He knew that years might pass before they met again. The deep compassion in Mary's eyes as they had rested on his sister came to his memory, and he bent down and gave her one kiss on the forehead.

'Good-bye, Milly!' he said. With hasty strides he left the room and the house, on his way to the station.

The Catherine sailed the next day for Sydney. And Milly was left behind.

CHAPTER XVIII

RAVENHILL FARM ONCE MORE

'DID you know that Milly was coming to confess it all?' asked Mary, as Malcolm and she left Rochester House.

'I should think so! If I hadn't, do you suppose I should have allowed you to stand there before the colonel, letting him patronise and forgive you like that? I had hard work keeping my tongue still as it was. How long were you going to stand it, Mary?'

'I didn't intend to say anything. I never meant to tell anybody, except, of course, the people at home. Indeed, I don't think I should have let the boys know . . . Poor Milly!'

Malcolm gave a sort of grunt, expressive of the amount of sympathy he felt for that young lady, who, to his mind, had come off far too easily.

'If one hadn't been so sorry for her brother, I should have felt inclined to back up the colonel in his intention of prosecuting Miss Ladbroke,' Malcolm said. 'However, we won't talk about her any more to-day, or think about her, if it's going to make you look like that! We have all been sad long enough, darling; there must be nothing but smiles to-day.'

A sudden expression of joy leapt at that moment

from Mary's lips, for there was Turnbull in the gig, driving up to them.

The next minute she was clasped in his arms.

'Well, my girl—my dear girl! We've got you back again, eh? And it's all proved that you never did it! Not that there were many who believed it of you. Still!'—

The 'Still' expressed his intense satisfaction that his more-than-an-own-daughter, as he liked to call her, had been vindicated before the eyes of the world.

What a lovely drive it was back to the farm, beneath the shade of the great elms, between hedges full of honeysuckle and dog-roses! The hay was just being carried, and the scent of it made the warm air delicious. Mary had not missed the whole of summer!

When the gig approached the farm, Mary saw that great preparations had been made to give her a triumphal welcome. Over the gate an archway of green had been formed, with garlands of flowers twisted round it, and a motto like a gigantic text, in letters which were rather uncertain about their up and down strokes,

MARY PROCLAIMED INNOCENT,

turned towards the road.

'Not much *Art*, but lots of *Heart*!' remarked Malcolm, on the principle that there was to be nothing but smiles to-day; for somehow all the signs of rejoicing seemed to touch Mary's eyes as quickly as her lips.

'The boys have been at work at that since daybreak,' said Turnbull. 'And they've been getting a grand feast ready too, out in the garden; for they said after

you'd been shut up so long we must have it in the open air, and if it was in the house it would not be a feast, only "just dinner." If they hadn't been so busy with their preparations, they'd never have let Malcolm go off to fetch you by himself, for all my telling them that he has got the first right in you now.'

There they were, all three of them, and Mrs. Love and her daughters; and last, but not least, in the blue-ribboned cap which she had had no heart to wear till to-day, Mrs. Turnbull.

Each of them was provided with a jubilee flag, which Jem had instructed them to wave as Mary approached the house. There was a great shout as the gig drove up the lane, and a tremendous flag-waving on the part of the young people, though 'mother,' as Jem remarked afterwards reproachfully, 'put down the flag just as she ought to have held it up . . . when she had the best one too, that cost sixpence . . . and burst into tears, when she ought to have shouted!'

It was not long before Mary was in her mother's arms. Then there were embraces to be received from the whole family, and half a dozen things being said at once, and half a dozen people wanting to pull her in different directions.

'We've such a lot to show you, and it's our turn to have you now,' said Jock. 'There's no good Malcolm looking at you like that! He'll have you all to himself soon enough. You belong to us now.'

It was decided that Mary should be shown the garden first, while the finishing touches were being given to the 'feast.'

The yellow sweet-peas had been induced to put forth one tiny blossom in honour of the occasion,

and the other seeds bequeathed by Mary to the boys had done their best, according to their opportunities.

'But we left the best bed for you, Polly,' they explained. 'And Malcolm wouldn't let anybody touch it but himself. He has been out to work in it every week.'

So after Mary had seen and wondered at and admired everything else, she was led to the *chef d'œuvre* of gardening skill. Here were all Mary's favourite flowers, blossoming somehow better than the boys' had been coaxed to do, for, as Malcolm remarked good-naturedly, he had been allowed the best bed. There were white sweet-peas, much prettier than the yellow ones, as Mary had to allow, white carnations, white roses, tall white lilies. Everything was white, except one little tuft of blue in the centre of the bed, where the initials *M.S.* in nemophilas were intertwined with *M.C.* in candytuft — a flower not nearly good enough to represent Mary, but the only white one that would blossom in the right way, at the right time, simultaneously with the nemophila. The device had been surrounded by a heart of mignonette, as Jock explained in confidence, but the mignonette would not grow evenly, in spite of all the lime scrapings, so Malcolm had had to grub it up. That, however, was the only failure in the whole bed, thanks to someone's 'capacity for taking infinite pains.'

Malcolm would keep hovering round Mary, much to the boys' annoyance, and would think that they were tiring her,—such nonsense, *tiring* Polly!—and he pronounced that the garden was the only sight she was to be shown before dinner. When Malcolm's bed had been seen, and, the boys supposed, duly admired, though, as they remarked afterwards among themselves with satisfaction, 'She didn't say half as much about it as she did about ours, you know,' there was an eager

desire expressed by the girls that Mary should come up and see her trousseau.

'My trousseau!'

'Yes, everything all ready for you. And who do you think, dear, has given you that?' said Mrs. Turnbull. 'Your Aunt Susan! As soon as she heard that Robert was providing Milly with an outfit for Australia, she said that you'd be wanting the same for Canada, and she gave us *twenty-five* pounds, and said we were to spend it all for you! You can't think how kind she's been; I wouldn't have believed it of her. She told us she would be glad if you would make your home with her.'

'Before she knew that I had set my heart upon marrying you right off,' Malcolm explained.

'But you wouldn't have had to go there, my girl,' said Turnbull. 'There's your old room waiting for you again! Ah, you haven't seen the improvements in the house; that's another thing we've got to show you! Mr. Fitzjames came to see us the day after the trial . . .'

'And he didn't believe that you were guilty,' interposed Jem. 'He said he'd seen too much of bad people not to know a good one apart from them.'

'And that though no jury would have acquitted you with the evidence so overwhelming against you, something might have been found out, if you had waited to be tried at the sessions,' added Mrs. Love. 'We all thought you should have done that, and have given the "Lord a chance of sparing you," as old Mrs. Seely expressed it. You know her queer way of putting things; she doesn't mean to be irreverent.'

'Yes, I think I ought to have done so,' Mary answered quietly, 'when father was so anxious that I should.'

'Though of course Mr. Fitzjames saw what a noble thing it was your wanting to save me expense like that,' said Turnbull. Whatever view Mary might take of her own conduct, in the eyes of those at home she was only a heroine. 'He asked how you came to go out to service at all, and when we explained to him that it was to make more room in the house, he went into the whole thing, and made me take him about and show him all over the place. He said that the house would be better for being enlarged; it wasn't the size it should be, to match the farm, and he's got Sir Philip to add to it. They've built on a bake-house at the back . . .'

'Such a convenience!' put in Mrs. Love.

'. . . and a bedroom over it that holds the girls; so you've got your own room; it has been made all ready for you, and I only wish, for our sakes, you were going to occupy it longer.'

There was a general march up of the whole family to Mary's room, to see how delighted she was with her trousseau.

'It's Malcolm that has chosen your dresses,' explained Mrs. Turnbull. 'We thought, as it's he that's going to see you in them, it was only fair. He would have most of them white. I told him you would say that was much too smart, but they're simply made—he likes everything simple, as you do—and in Canada the summers are very hot. Of course, as his wife,' she added, below her breath, 'you'll be in rather a different position from what you have been here.'

'And whatever wasn't white had to be blue,' said Mrs. Love, displaying a sailor suit intended for the voyage; 'because you had on blue when he saw you first.'

'That's not the only reason,' whispered Emily.

'Malcolm says that, abroad, blue and white are considered the colours of St. Mary, and he thinks you are the woman that comes nearest of any Marys there have ever been to your namesake the Virgin. I heard him say that to auntie one day, when he thought no one was listening!'

'Won't Mary try on one of the white dresses now?' Malcolm asked. 'I don't like seeing her in black.'

Everybody caught at the idea, and, if they did not all guess the thought underlying his request, there was not one who saw Mary come down a few minutes later, dressed in the colour of innocence, that was not struck with the appropriateness of her spotless attire.

By now the feast was ready, spread out on a big table covered with the finest damask cloth, under the trees. A very fine feast it was, set off by the decoration of roses and sprays of briony which Emily had disposed with artistic taste. There were lamb and green peas, a home-cured ham and a pair of spring chickens, dainty sweet dishes, and great bowls of strawberries and jugs of thick cream, and everything that anybody could think of that 'Polly used to like.'

'This must be the feast I have always been dreaming about!' exclaimed Mary. 'Yes, I think I've dreamt about it almost every night!' At which the whole party laughed hilariously, except Mary's mother and Malcolm, who had learned to know the meaning of certain symptoms since he gave up having dinner.

'And this is the cup of tea I have been looking forward to for three months,' laughed Mary, as she was set in the seat of honour, under a sort of smaller triumphal arch, with Chinese lanterns bobbing up and down upon her head. Someone had recollected that Mary liked a cup of tea at dinner.

She did not add, 'And this is the first time for

three months that I have not felt hungry,' because it would have sounded so ungracious. And, as a matter of fact, when she had drunk that first cup of tea, she felt no aversion to a slice of chicken and some of the early marrowfats and new potatoes, not allowed to be begun till to-day, or to the fresh lettuce just cut as the gig drove up, and was led on to partake with appetite of curds and cream. And though she could not, as the boys would have liked, consume a large quantity of the frosted cake, and the jubilee pudding made from Aunt Fanny's recipe, and the blancmange for which Emily Love had become famous, and the 'fairy's food,' a Canadian dish, for which the boys had cut up the oranges, and the Scotch shortbread which was Malcolm's contribution to the feast, and some half-dozen other viands of especial interest, she enjoyed the strawberries as much as anyone could wish.

As Mary sat there, with the warm air, sweet with the mingled odours of hay and roses and acacia, blowing into her face, Malcolm seated on one side of her, and her mother upon the other, with her innocence established, and the happiest future a woman can know before her, she had the feeling that it was not hard to realise what heaven must be.

'There is only one thing you haven't had yet,' said Turnbull, as they lingered under the trees when the repast was over. 'That's a letter which came for you to-day. Derrington is the postmark. Who is it lives at Derrington?'

Mary opened the letter and read it.

'It is from Mr. Despard,' she said. 'He has offered me a situation to help the matron in a Home he has started for young women, first offenders, when they have just come out of prison! Isn't it

good of him? And if I hadn't been going to marry Malcolm'—

'Which you are,' Malcolm remarked promptly and decisively. 'Nothing more to do with prisons for you!'

'Just fancy!' Mary said. 'Here have four homes been offered to me . . . would have been open to me, even if I had not been proved innocent; and when I was in prison I used to think there would be nothing for me to do but go as "general" in some charitable tradesman's cottage!'

That was when Malcolm had taken possession of her at last, which was not until the end of the afternoon, when tea was over, and they were walking along the garden paths alone together. 'It shows how foolish it was not to have more faith, doesn't it?'

But Malcolm would not allow that there had ever been a time when Mary had not had more sense, in common with every quality that was desirable, than any other woman.

'What a good thing for me that I have been under Kate and Johnson and Miss Pearson before I marry you, Malcolm!' Mary said, with a very tender laugh. 'All the people at home are bad enough, but you! . . .' To which his answer was—

'If you want me to leave off thinking you perfection, you have got to leave off being perfect,' which had the curious effect of making Mary feel very humble.

'There is one thing I want to say to you, Malcolm,' said Mary, before they returned to the rest. 'I should like Mr. Despard to have the money for this bracelet for his Home. I could not have spent it on anything for myself, you know, when it means . . .

no, not what I suffered myself, *that* seems like David's troubles did to him, when he said he had been brought from the deep of the earth again . . . but all that it means for poor Milly. And I was wanting so much to do some little thing for prisoners. Mr. Despard would perhaps be able to sell the bracelet better than I should, and . . . I don't like the feeling of having it, somehow. Will you take it and send it to him to-night?'

Malcolm gave a most willing consent.

'By the way, you haven't looked at the colonel's cheque yet,' he remarked. She had forgotten all about it.

Mary drew the envelope from her pocket, opened it, and glanced at the contents. They had reached the rest of the party now. On the sheet of paper which enclosed the cheque was written—

'For Mary Copeland, as a mark of regret and the highest esteem, from her former employer, Colonel Bridger, with all good wishes for her married life.'

Mary read the words aloud, and then looked at the cheque.

'There must be some mistake about it,' she said. 'It is for five hundred pounds!'

Malcolm took it. 'There is no mistake. You see the sum is written twice, in words and in figures,' he said.

The boys clapped their hands; Mrs. Love and her daughter made exclamations of astonishment. Mrs. Turnbull kissed Mary irrelevantly, and Turnbull remarked—

'Five hundred pounds! That's something like five guineas a day for the time you've been in prison!

Not bad pay for your labour, eh? Well, now I'll forgive the colonel and the whole lot of them at Rochester House, which I may say that I never did till this minute. He's done his best to make it up to you, and that's all a man can do.'

'And now I think Mary ought to rest,' Malcolm said, with an unselfishness that Mary's mother appreciated, though the boys made an outcry at the idea of her going to bed '*before seven*'; and Turnbull was about to open his mouth in protest, till a keener scrutiny of his daughter's face than he had given it yet, as, at his words, she rose from the seat she had taken, made him feel that her future husband's solicitude was not superfluous.

'That's right. Take care of her, Malcolm,' he said, rather huskily. 'She won't look quite so near the colour of her gown after a good sleep between linen sheets.'

'And I shall bring you up something the last thing before we go to supper,' said Mrs. Love, whom Turnbull called the Martha of the household. 'What would you like me to make for you, dear? I'm a splendid hand at sick cooking.'

'I know you are, Aunt Fanny. Thank you so much! Anything you like . . .' Mary broke into one of the old merry laughs that Malcolm had feared he would never hear again, as she finished her sentence,—'anything, that is to say, except gruel!'

CHAPTER XIX

'A WEALTHY PLACE'

IT was a lovely evening in September. The greatest heat of the Canadian summer was over, but it was still warm and delicious. Golden-rod and Michaelmas daisies had taken the place of the cinnamon roses and 'black-eyed Susans' with which Mary had made acquaintance earlier in the season, and the pailfuls of wild raspberries that the children brought to the door, following the pailfuls of wild strawberries which had so surprised her, were now replaced by blueberries in as great plenty. Everything that Nature produced seemed to be in profusion in Canada.

The pretty gabled wooden house, with its green shutters and broad balcony, standing in the midst of a gay flower-garden that sloped down to the river, and with as many acres of farmland at the back as there were in the whole of Sir Philip Fitzjames's property, was now Malcolm's own. His mother lived on with him, and the two unmarried daughters, girls not yet grown up. It was so nice to have *sisters*, Mary said, dropping the 'in-law' as she had the 'step' that by right belonged to the brothers at home. 'The old home'—that was still as dear as ever, and it was with great eagerness

that she looked forward to the day when Jem and Jock were coming out to Malcolm's farm. But Moose Creek had become 'home' to Mary now. The first sight of her face, the first sound of her voice, had drawn out the hearts of all her new relatives to her, and the letter old Mrs. Stewart had written to Mrs. Turnbull about her daughter-in-law satisfied even the party at Ravenhill.

Indeed, Mary had met with no lack of appreciation. To her amusement, not to say embarrassment, she found herself looked on in Minnemichi as a sort of story-book heroine. Everybody had been eager to make the acquaintance of Malcolm's wife and show her hospitality; and when the English bride proved to have no airs about her, and to be as 'capable' in all affairs of household management as she was pretty, and as sweet and loving and light-hearted as she was —to use old Mrs. Stewart's phrase—'earnest-minded,' it was generally agreed that Malcolm had found a treasure. That was before Miss Ladbroke's unexpected death had made Mary, on that side of the Atlantic where capital brings in a much higher rate of interest than in England, almost an heiress, and before her tender nursing of old Mr. Stewart through the last months of his illness had given her a place in the hearts of her husband's family equal to that she had held in those at Ravenhill Farm.

'People say the first year of a woman's married life is the most trying. Mine has been very trying, Malcolm—to my self-conceit!' Mary was saying, as she and her husband stood on the bank of the river that warm evening, watching for the appearance of the daily steamer that plied between St. John and Fredericton, and stopped at all the villages on the way.

'I wonder what I *should* have been,' she added, laughing tenderly, 'with all the spoiling I come in for here, on the top of the spoiling I had had all my life in the old home, if it hadn't been for those three months!'

She looked up into his face, and he looked down into hers, with that look in their eyes which is only produced by the perfect mutual love between husband and wife which belongs to an ideal marriage.

'I think I have forgiven her now,' he said, in a rather low voice.

'You promised me that you would forgive her before we married, Malcolm.'

'I didn't say when, though, did I?'

'You said not until I had got back my old roses and dimples again. I don't know about the dimples, married women don't want them, do they? I've given mine to baby,' as she looked down in the face of the sturdy little fellow who was just beginning to smile ('wonderfully early,' people said, 'but no wonder with such a smiling face as his mother's always bending over him'). 'And as for the roses, I got those back again before we left England.'

'Not the real old red ones, until you had had ten days of Atlantic breezes.'

'What fun that voyage was!' said Mary. 'But then, everything was fun with you; even having to keep accounts in dollars and cents instead of pounds, shillings and pence, and to order about these smart young women, who looked as if they ought to be my mistresses instead of my servants. Though they really are very good-hearted,' she added. 'Urania and I get on capitally together, and though I can't help thinking how much nicer Beatrice would look in a cap and apron, she does get through a lot of work in

the day. Urania has been making all sorts of wonderful things for this evening, "Washington pie" and "strawberry shortcake," and I don't know what all besides.'

Malcolm laughed at her having picked up a Canadian expression.

'We are going to have quite a banquet this evening, aren't we?' he said.

'Yes . . . something like the feast they had for me the day I came home. It must be something like coming out of prison to poor Milly, leaving that dreadful place. She had no more chance of getting away, you see, after Robert put her there, than I had of escaping from the gaol.'

'Robert did not know what it was going to be like when he arranged for her to go there. Though he was so stern with Milly, he has always been a splendid brother to her, and he is really fond of her still, as this tremendously grateful letter we have just had from him shows. Of course it was all right till Mrs. Collins's husband came home.'

'Still, she must have gone through a lot from the first. You remember that day I met her pushing the "pram" with those two children that were always crying in it. She didn't look at me; she seemed to try not to look at anyone, but those two old friends of hers passed close to her, and she had to raise her eyes as she turned the "pram" aside . . . and the way they looked at her! I should like to have boxed their ears!'

'That is the kind of women they were,' remarked Malcolm. 'I always think it was owing to the Miss Simpsons that the whole thing came out in the papers. I heard they were violent friends with a journalist living in the same hotel with them. I am afraid I wasn't

very sorry that everybody should know the truth, but it can't have made things sweeter for Milly.'

'Poor Milly!' repeated Mary. And again Malcolm looked at her.

'Hark! there's the whistle,' cried Mary suddenly. 'Yes, that's the smoke of the steamer. Run into the house with baby!'

Malcolm proceeded instantly to take his son and heir in his arms.

'Oh, Malcolm, Malcolm!' Mary exclaimed, in mock despair, 'how often am I to tell you that it isn't the right thing for husbands to obey their wives? Wives must obey their husbands. You are the most difficult person to train I ever met with! What you ought to have said was, "'Don't order me about like that, Mary!"'

'It wouldn't have been any good,' he answered, 'for I never could have said it in your impressive way. Anyhow, it's too late now, because I've got him. Ah, here is Bessie coming to take him from us;' as the baby's youngest aunt, a sweet-tempered, fair-haired girl, came running from the house with outstretched arms.

'I'm to have him now, Molly,' she said. The *P* of Ravenhill had turned to an *M* out here. 'Everything's all ready. I've put a great bunch of sweet-peas in Miss Ladbroke's room. It is a pity she's only going to stay one night!'

Bessie carried off her little nephew, and Malcolm and Mary stood watching intently the approach of the River Belle.

'You must be very nice to her, dear, just as if nothing had ever happened,' Mary said.

'It seems to me,' he answered, with a twinkle in his eyes, 'that you have just given me a capital

opportunity for showing disobedience. I hope I shan't be inclined to be impolite in my own house,' he went on, with a change to gravity, 'but it is impossible to forget the past. One may forgive what she did, but one cannot feel the same towards a person who showed herself what she must have been to act in that way.'

'Can't we forget what she *has been*, Malcolm, when she is so different now, ever since she came under Mr. Despard's influence? No, you are not to look doubtful about it. She must be very much changed to take your letter as she did. I know by your not letting me write myself, and not showing me your letter before you sent it, that you wrote very sternly. Making out too that we would only pay for her passage steerage, and that she would be in no better position than maid-of-all-work to Henrietta, and letting her think that everybody here knew all about the past . . . it was hardly truthful of you!'

'I felt that one really must test her in some way,' he answered gravely. 'Unless she had genuinely changed as you thought she had, I could hardly have introduced her into Henrietta's household. And I was particularly anxious not to make the project too attractive, because unless she really was as badly treated where she was, as we gathered from her letters, I should have thought it better to leave her there. But by the way she jumped at our proposal, evidently she has been having a pretty hard time of it.'

'I can't think how any man could be brutal; to half starve her like that, and refuse her even a pair of new boots when the soles of the others were worn through; and make her work so very hard, and then be always taunting her about being a thief, and making out she ought to be thankful to be kept by

them, while, by refusing to give her a character, he made it impossible for her to leave. And you know, Malcolm, she never told us half, till this letter answering ours, in which we offered to have her out here. How gratefully and humbly she writes, too, poor girl!' added Mary, looking through the letter they had received from Milly a few days ago. 'And you know, Malcolm, it must have been very hard, humbling herself to *you*.'

Malcolm had his doubts whether the refinement of Milly's feelings was sufficient for them to be judged of by the standard of Mary in such a matter, but he promised to be considerate for any possible sensitiveness.

The steamer was coming in. It was but a few steps from the Stewart's garden to the landing-stage, and Malcolm and Mary went down to it and stood there ready to receive their guest. Milly was the only person to land.

As she came across the gangway and her eyes met theirs, even Malcolm saw for himself that she was changed. In appearance, at least, remarkably for the better. In her perfectly plain dress and hat, with her hair brushed back from her forehead, and with the old self-conscious, flippant expression gone from her face, Malcolm, who had never admired her looks in the least, thought what a pretty girl she was!

She gave her hand to Malcolm first, a small, trembling hand, and her eyes fell. All the pity of his strong manhood came over him with a rush. His handshake was as hearty and his voice as cordial as Mary herself could wish.

'Welcome to Canada, Milly!' he said, addressing her at last by her Christian name as a cousin, which he had never done before. 'We are very glad to see you.'

Then she raised her eyes, full of tears. 'Thank you, Malcolm!' she said. It meant a great deal.

With those naturally quick perceptions which her three months' discipline had greatly perfected, Mary guessed what it must be to this girl to meet Malcolm, the man who had been bound up with all the bitterest experience of her life; the man at whose feet she had knelt, and in vain; the man whom she had loved, and who was now her rival's husband.

It seemed to Mary that in those two words Milly offered her complete submission. A recollection of that Good Friday in Exbridge Gaol came over her, as she held out her arms and folded her cousin in them.

'Dear Milly, I am so thankful!' she said.

As Milly clung to her, returning her kisses with touching responsiveness, Malcolm turned away, his eyelids blinking foolishly. He had really forgiven her now.

As they walked up to the house, Milly put a little packet into Mary's hand.

'That's the rest of the money,' she said. 'It was very good of you to want me to come second-class, but third was quite good enough. I came with a party of G.F.S. girls, so I did not have to mix with the rough people. And I did not have to spend nearly as much as you allowed for on my clothes. You have had so much expense for me as it is. But you'll let me pay you back,' she went on eagerly. 'I am to have some wages, Malcolm told me, in this place.'

'It isn't a *place* exactly, Milly,' Mary said, pressing back the little packet of money between her unwilling fingers. 'You are going to live with my married sister-in law, Mrs. Bewick. She only keeps a servant in the busy part of the year; we all of us work hard

out here, and you will help her in what requires doing. But the real reason she wants you is that her husband, who is a doctor, is out all through the day, and she thought it would be pleasant to have some companion with her. She looks upon you as a cousin —through me, you know — and though, of course, you will receive a salary, your position will be that of a relative. She always speaks about you now as "Milly." But you must keep this money, dear,' Mary went on; 'what we sent you was the first instalment of the interest from poor Aunt Susan's fortune, and we both felt we wanted you to have it.'

Mary did not explain that the salary Milly would receive was also to come out of that money, to which she could not lose a feeling that Milly was in some measure entitled. That was a private arrangement for the mutual benefit of Malcolm's sister and Mary's cousin. 'And,' she added, under her breath, 'nobody here knows about the past. They have heard my story, but they have not any idea that you were connected with it.' The look that met Mary in reply would have repaid her for a great deal, had she needed repayment.

The warmth and friendliness of the greeting Milly received from all Mary's relatives, including Henrietta, who was there to welcome her, quite overcame the girl, who had felt herself a pariah for so long, and Mary hastened her upstairs to the pretty guest-room, especially brightened up for her reception.

'Oh, Mary, how good you have been to me! . . . How good you have been to me!' sobbed Milly. 'If it hadn't been for you, I don't know what I should have done! No one knows what I went through, from the time Mr. Collins came home to live. And then to feel I deserved it all!'

'But Mr. Despard helped you, didn't he?'

'Oh yes! He came and looked me out, just because he had heard how wicked I'd been. Wasn't it good of him? And he spoke so beautifully. I couldn't repeat all he said, and if I did it wouldn't sound the same. But he made me see that the consequences of one's sins, taken the hopeless way I was taking them, just destroyed the soul, but that they might be made a thing one would thank God for. Directly one had set oneself to repent and was forgiven, the punishment began to be a blessing. He said *he had found it so*! Could you have believed that he had done anything wicked? But he did seem to know exactly how one would feel, and to pity one; and yet he was so firm. When he was gone . . . I don't feel I can tell anybody about it, but I think I did repent—begin to repent, at least. Mr. Despard said it was a great piece of work, and one could only do it bit by bit; only one should start with the consciousness that one was forgiven. And that was just what I couldn't believe, somehow. I thought of how Robert had been with me when he left, and the way your husband looked at me, and the colonel's words, and everybody, even Aunt Susan, refusing to have anything to do with me, and how I deserved it all; and I began to grow quite despairing again. And then your letter came, with the present you sent me for my birthday! And to think that *you* had remembered my birthday! This year, too, when of course no one else took any notice of it; and the kind, sympathetic way you wrote! . . .' Milly's voice broke again. 'From that time,' she went on, 'it was all different. I felt, if you could forgive me, if there was one person in the world who really did care for me, and that was *you*, whom I had injured so terribly . . .'

She did not finish her sentence. It was not necessary. The two women stood with their hands locked in each other's, looking out on the glory of the golden sunset reflected on the broad calm surface of the water, while the delicious odour from the pine forests on the other side of the river filled the air with fragrance, and the faint plash of a paddle broke the stillness as a canoe glided past, until the laughing voices of the girls came up from the garden, calling—

'Supper's ready, Molly. Bring down Cousin Milly quick, or the coffee will be cold!'

'I never looked on it as you who sent me to prison,' Mary said softly. 'I wanted my discipline as much as anybody, and I shall always thank God for my three months there. He has led us through fire and water, has He not, Milly?'

It was not hard to tell what bitter tears of repentance had flowed through Milly's eyes before that new look had come into them, which had made her face so gentle and pathetic. 'And He has brought us out into a wealthy place!'

THE END

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